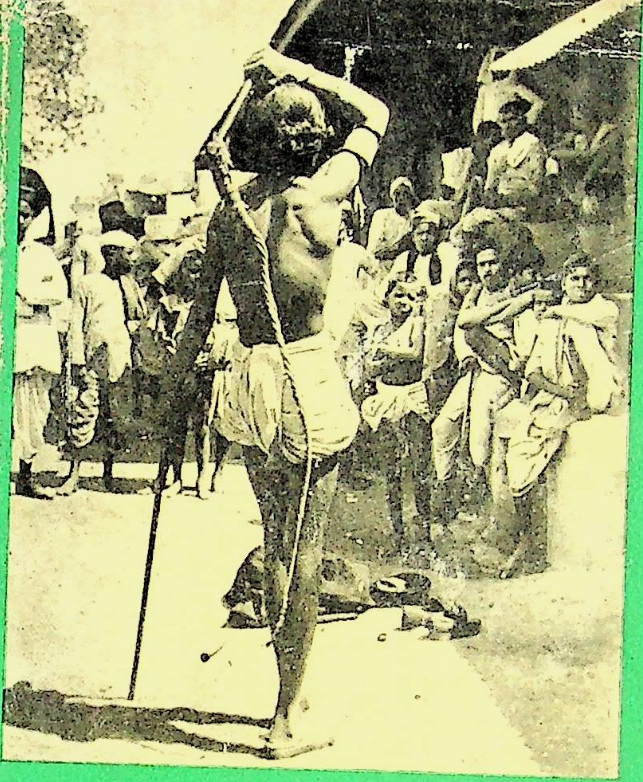
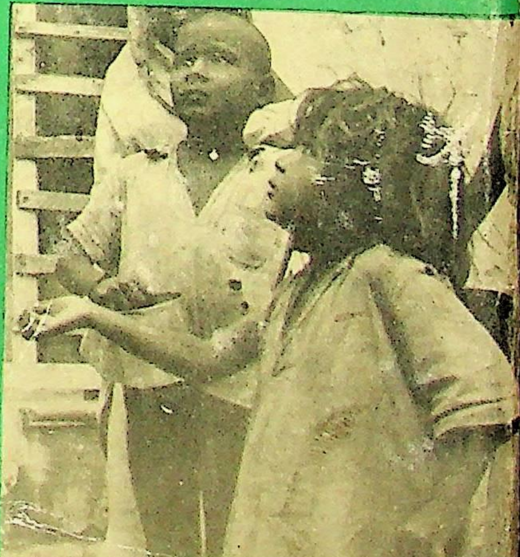


IN SEARCH OF A YOGI

Himalayan Pilgrimage



DENYS
LEDGE

This is the story of a pilgrimage. Father Rutledge, after founding a small community of Benedictine monks near Poona, became curious about the nature of Hinduism and the idea of the true Yogi or saint. Before coming back to England he made a journey to the source of Hinduism, which is also the source of the Ganges, in search of a Yogi. The general conclusion, reading between the lines, is that so far from looking up to the East as the fountain of true mysticism, the East might well look to Christianity.

It is a fascinating and most readable travel book, as well as a profound exploration of two spiritual worlds.

IN SEARCH OF
A YOGI

IN SEARCH OF A YOGI

Himalayan Pilgrimage

by

DOM DENYS RUTLEDGE

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Preface

THIS is an account of a journey in India from Banaras up towards the source of the Ganges, undertaken at the turn of the year 1959–60 at the conclusion of a task in the Poona district. Fundamentally it was an enquiry into the claim of the Indian Yogi to control matter by mind, to control the world of phenomena by the spirit even to the extent of calling it into existence and dissolving it. Both Hindu and Christian believe this can be done, and that this is in fact, or should be, the normal state of things, in which the material and visible world is completely subject to the spiritual and unseen. The Christian believes he will be able to do this fully only after death, though the radical restoration of the normal order through his incorporation into Christ may even in this life, under suitable conditions, begin to produce its effect. The Hindu Yogi believes that he can do it here and now by his own natural powers.

My purpose was to investigate this claim of the yogi, primarily to find whether he could in fact do what he claimed to do, and only secondarily to examine in the light of Christian revelation the details of the technique by which he hoped to accomplish it.

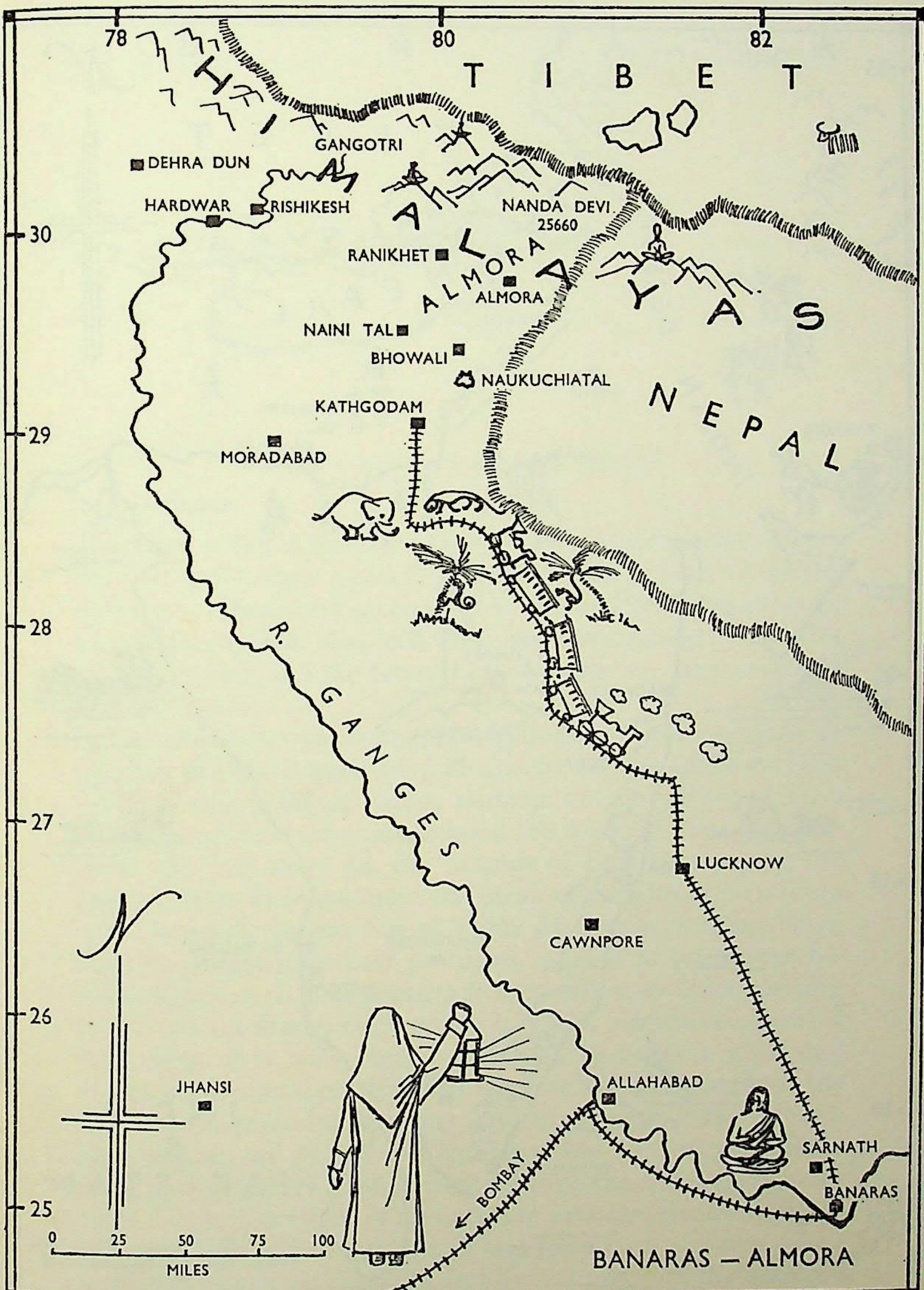
It was thus a journey on two planes. The lower, the world of phenomena, in both the Hindu and the Christian conception, is a manifestation of the higher and depends on this. To understand the lower it was therefore necessary to visit the higher; on the other hand the lower provided a clue to what one might expect to find on the higher which is of its nature further removed from everyday experience. It was therefore necessary to shuttle to and fro between the two. At intervals one had to stop and take bearings in order to decide on which plane of reality one was indeed standing.

This was, then, the purpose of my journey, but in the process

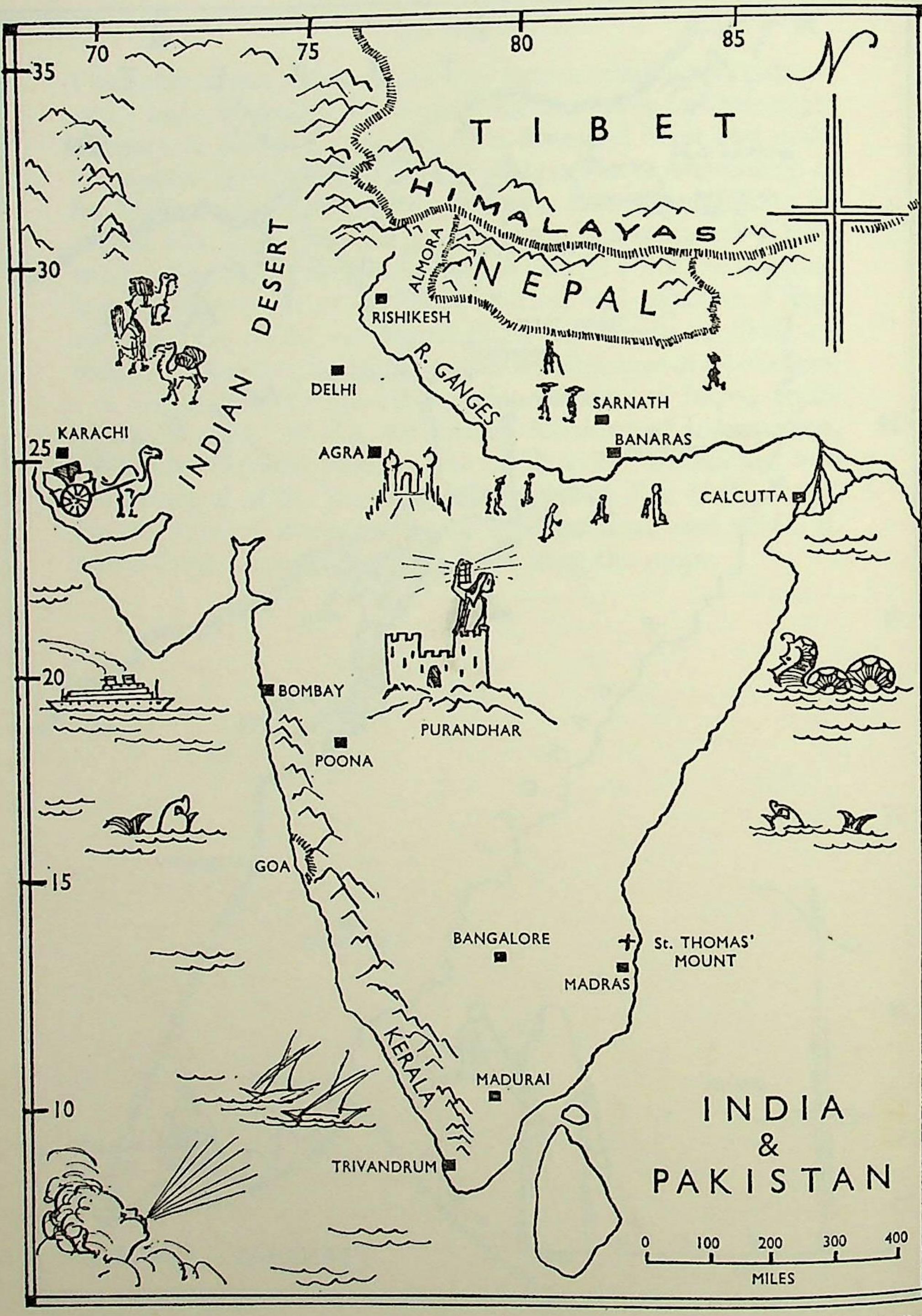
I was able to gain some insight into Indian religion and culture, and I hope that what I have written may serve in some slight measure to bridge the gap between East and West and make for mutual understanding. My first abbot, later Archbishop of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, used to say that the only place for a man who said what he thought was a desert island. I have tried to bear this in mind; at the same time, if a work of this kind is to be of any value at all it must be frank and objective. I hope nothing I have said will offend either my Hindu or Christian friends. I have only the most friendly recollections of all of them.

I am grateful to the Information Service of India, India House, London, W.C.2, the Indian Ministry of Information, Delhi, the Medical Mission Sisters, Osterley, Middlesex, and the Principal of St. Joseph's College, Naini Tal, U.P., India, for the loan of photographs for reproduction, and to C. E. Miles-Knolles for her kindness in drawing the maps.

D. R.



C. E. Miles-Knolles



C. E. Miles-Knolles

I

Preparation

'WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?'

THE latter half of the year 1959 found me seated on the ledge of a hill in India, some 4,000 ft. above sea level, asking myself the question: 'Where do I go from here?' I have found, as so many others have found, that hills form excellent vantage points for taking the long and the broad view, whether on the physical or spiritual plane.

I recalled other experiences on hilltops, when in one form or another the same question had arisen: on the Malvern Hills where I had stood as a boy, perhaps on the very spot from which Langland had contemplated the *Vision of Piers Plowman*; amid the July snow on the summit of Ben Nevis; atop the Empire State Building amid the bleak mountains of New York City; beneath the flat top of Table Mountain, looking down over Cape Town and its problems, unable to go higher because high winds had prevented the cable-cars from running and I had not time enough to climb. There was the occasion—I still think of it with sorrow—when I had lost a cherished *Blackbird* fountain-pen that had seen me safely through all the dark examination hours of my student days. It had evidently slipped from my pocket as I squirmed my way on my middle round the corner of a hill in Sicily during the last war, anxious to avoid the attentions of an accurate and conscientious sniper stationed somewhere opposite. I had been told that one of my sergeants was dying there. In fact he was not, and the question arose where to go from here: if I completed the circuit of the

hill there was just the possibility that he might be somewhere there, though it was more likely that he had been mistaken for the young lieutenant I had found already dead. I went on, making a dash for the last hundred yards, since I was tired of squirming, only to find the sergeant safe and sound. It was only later that I realized I had lost my pen. This had been used for filling in the burial forms which a chaplain has to forward to army headquarters, with map reference and easily recognizable landmarks, for each temporary burial he performs, so that later the bodies may be taken up and given a permanent resting-place in the neat cemeteries that burgeon where an army has passed. For the rest of that campaign my records had to be made with the stub of a pencil. I hope my burials were uncovered successfully. I never heard.

Or there was the occasion when, having become separated at dusk from my brigade, I found myself at midnight under the walls of a hilltop town held by the enemy, listening to the bells of some convent chapel ringing for the Night Office. This time I found a little hollow where I was not likely to be disturbed by an enemy patrol and went to sleep. I could not sleep long because of the cold; I was wearing only a shirt and shorts, with the towel from my haversack rolled round my neck as a scarf. By daybreak it was obvious where I had to go.

If all this should appear to the reader as a digression, I apologize. It seems necessary in order to prepare for what is to follow, for the fact that a Benedictine monk, whose whole life is supposed to be passed in what is commonly considered the peace and security of the cloister, may yet be found seated on a hilltop in India and later wandering in the foothills of the Himalayas. St. Benedict's *Rule for Monasteries*, accepted by the time of Charlemagne as the definitive code for western monks, takes the most elaborate precautions to sever the monk's connection with the world outside the monastery, even enjoining that so far as possible everything necessary for the support of life should be produced within the monastic enclosure, as 'water, a mill and a garden, and the various crafts—so that there may be no need for the monks to wander abroad, for this is by no means expedient for their souls'.[1] Reflecting on this passage and thinking how differently things may work out in practice for one who,

[1] *Rule of St. Benedict*, ch. 66.

in St. Benedict's phrase, is 'truly seeking God'[1] I once sat down and in a few moments made a list of more than thirty odd situations in which I personally had found myself; odd, that is, by any standards but particularly odd for one whose life should normally be spent within the enclosure of a monastery. The reader might reasonably, then, expect a word of explanation of how I came to find myself in the present situation; a short account of what I had been doing there may also be useful to those who have no personal experience of India, both as general background and as indicating my preparation and qualifications for the journey I was to make. A monk is not usually called upon to decide for himself what his next move is to be, but in this case, through circumstances beyond the scope of this book, it had been left to my discretion.

I had come to India to assist in the establishment of a monastic community of the 'contemplative' type for men. It may seem tautological to add 'contemplative' to 'monastic' taken in its strict sense of Benedictines, Cistercians and Carthusians, but in fact 'Black Benedictines' at least have, with few exceptions, tended to become assimilated in modern times to the 'active' orders and congregations in devoting themselves to teaching and pastoral work. The active orders of men had been well represented in India for the past four hundred years, but Christian monks in the strict sense had been quite unknown until very recently. All human activity does of course, or at least should, lead to contemplation and union with God, but until now it had been only the active aspect of the Church's life that had been shown to India; not that the other aspect did not exist, but what people in fact saw were the externals, educational, medical, relief of the poor and similar services to mankind, grasped at eagerly enough yet not connected in their minds with religion as they knew it. It was so unlike their own religion which finds its highest expression in complete renunciation of material things and withdrawal from the sensible world in order to become one with God. It was not, I repeat, that this ideal did not exist among the Christian missionaries, only that it was not sufficiently evident to the Hindu and Moslem and Buddhist. Unknown to them was the sight familiar enough to the medieval West of a body of men whose sole

[1] Op. cit., ch. 58.

purpose was to seek God, completely cut off from the surrounding world in order to be free to pursue their purpose, and so incidentally presenting a microcosm, a world in miniature, in which every activity was directed immediately to the praise and worship of God, and the visible world was realized in its normal relationship as a reflection of the invisible. This was unknown in India, and especially it was not realized that in this lay the full development and presentation of the Christian life, that this was also historically the aboriginal cell from which developed the Christian civilization of the West, a civilization now declining because it has lost its ideal. Not least important, it was a form of life that resolved the tension between the visible world and the invisible, either of which man neglects only at his peril.

The significance of this will, I hope, appear later. The point here is that I had come to India to assist Indians in forming such a way of life in a Benedictine monastic community. It was one of four parallel attempts, each with a slightly different angle of approach but with the same end. The nucleus of such a community had now been formed, the life organized and its lines of development plotted. As the only European monk I felt the time had now come to retire more or less gracefully and leave Indians to continue free of non-Indian control. This must not be misunderstood. The Catholic Church is supra-national; race and colour are of no significance. Still the national aspirations of people who have only recently achieved political independence, or are still on the road to it, have to be considered; and it is the Church's policy that such people should as far as possible have religious superiors of the same culture and nationality.

The tiny monastery or *ashram* on the ledge of the hill where I now found myself, reflecting on former queer situations on other hilltops, is situated within the outer fortifications of Purandhar Fort, best known to modern Indians through its associations with Shivaji and the fierce Maratha warriors who were such redoubtable opponents of the Portuguese and later of the British. Though first mentioned as a fort in the early fourteenth century, examination of the numerous caves suggests that the site has been occupied for thousands of years. Its last use under British rule was as a very free and open internment camp for

enemy aliens during the last war. Before that it was much sought after as a station by the troops centred on Poona, and one side of the hill was chosen as the site of a sanatorium for sick troops because of its pleasant climate and good water supply.

It is an obvious site for a fort: 4,584 ft. above sea level at its highest point and commanding the surrounding plain in every direction. The upper fort, containing the water-tanks, magazine and, characteristically, on the highest point a small Hindu temple, appears to be impregnable with its precipitous cliffs crowned by massive walls and entered by a series of heavily fortified gateways and towers, but in fact it has been taken and retaken many times in the course of its history. Many stories are connected with it. One, which seems well authenticated, tells that a certain King of Bidar, who had trouble with the building of one of the main bastions, Shendi Buruj—it had collapsed several times—was warned repeatedly in a dream that he would never succeed until he buried alive in the foundations a first-born son and his wife. A suitable couple were found, and after that the building proceeded smoothly. I was also told that gold bricks to the value of twenty-five million rupees were buried in the foundation, but though I looked hopefully as succeeding monsoons washed down more and more of the hill-side, I saw no sign of it.

The 'surrounding plain' is more correctly a level plateau. The hill on which the fort is placed descends abruptly a thousand feet or so. Travelling north one comes after six miles to the nearest large village, Saswad, from which most of our provisions were obtained while we tried to build up our own supply. Six miles further and the ground again falls away precipitously for another thousand feet to the plateau on which Poona is situated another twelve miles further on, itself about 2,000 ft. above sea level. This feature is typical of much of India. I have always been fascinated by the way in which mountains suddenly rear up from a completely level plain. So it is with many of the approaches to the Himalayas, as, for instance, at Kathgodam. The train saunters (I use the word deliberately) over the level plain, then suddenly there are the mountains, springing straight up as a child might draw them, and stretching, a series of gigantic steps, range upon range, to the land of eternal snow and the abode of the gods. Every hill is, for that matter, in a

greater or lesser degree the abode of the gods, and I well remember a young Hindu, on a weary train journey from Madras to Bombay, drawing my attention to an insignificant-looking hill and saying with great solemnity: 'There is God.'

Poona, then, twenty-four miles to the north-east from the foot of our hill, was the nearest town, and Saswad the nearest village of any size; and since the fort had been deserted since the British withdrawal and the barrack buildings were falling into ruins, we were able to live in considerable isolation, undisturbed except by occasional picnic parties, principally of school-children and church students from Poona. One of my first concerns was to place a guard over the well in our small compound, the first drinking-water readily available as one reaches the lower fort after climbing the hill, so that thirsty youth might be able to drink its fill, but without spoiling it for us and succeeding parties of climbers. I have on occasion produced coffee for fifty or more of them, but with our primitive cooking arrangements it was not easy to heat water for so many at short notice.

The monastery—though that is much too large a word for it—was simply the old, small Catholic garrison church, built about the time of the Mutiny, now deserted, together with small priest's bungalow, out-buildings, well and compound. It stands apart on a ledge of hill winding between the main barrack buildings and the sanatorium. Its position is in many ways similar to that of St. Benedict's own original foundation fourteen hundred years before; but, however romantic that may sound, in fact we settled there because it was the only place at all suitable that I could get for nothing on my arrival in India without money and with no knowledge of the country or of local conditions.

KERALA-POONA

During negotiations for the taking over of this, the property by that time of the Bishop of Poona, involving correspondence with my abbot in the Highlands of Scotland, I was the guest of Benedict Mar Gregorios, the young and energetic Syro-Malankara Archbishop of Trivandrum, Kerala. It was the period during which the anti-Communist agitation that led to

the suspension of the constitution was coming to a head, and I was thus able to meet many of the protagonists and to gain an insight into aspects of the problem that would otherwise have remained hidden. Not the least of these was the extent of the division between the many Christian groups even in the face of their common enemy.

I was for several days forbidden—or at least implored most earnestly—not to go outside the grounds of Archbishop's House for fear that I should suffer violence. I was later allowed out on condition that I kept to the main road. There were in fact some strongly Communist villages in the neighbourhood and it had been my custom to go for a longish walk after lunch, usually avoiding the main road and cutting through the small villages. On one occasion, as I strode down a narrow lane, my way was blocked by a man who demanded to know where I was going. One might have thought that 'this was it', but in fact it was probably only the opening move of the common Indian catechism to which every stranger is subjected: where is one going; where has one come from; why has one come from there; one's name, one's father's name, nationality, age, present occupation, expectancy of life, tastes in food, political allegiance, impressions of India—most important this. I was rather unkind, and spoiled the game by simply saying that I was not going anywhere, I was just walking. And I continued to walk. He stood gazing with a puzzled expression, but saying nothing. He probably thought I was mad, and madmen, whether possessed by god or devil, are to be treated with great respect and forbearance.

It is only fair to add that during my whole stay of several months in the South I met with nothing but the most complete kindness and courtesy at a time when feelings were running very high, although I must have been a conspicuous figure in my unusual white Benedictine habit. Unfortunately too the Terylene of which this was made was considered everywhere to be a most expensive and luxurious material and might have been taken as evidence of a bourgeois and capitalist origin. In fact it was bought as a remnant in a Cheshire market at 4*s*. 6*d*. a yard, the cheapest and most practical material I could find for my purpose.

The only case I can recall of deliberately offensive action in a

stay of nearly three years occurred not in Kerala but in the very sophisticated, intellectual and rather bourgeois Poona on my way south shortly after landing. There, on my way along the railway platform out into the town, I was joined by a man who offered me two annas, suggesting that I might like some tea. (Two annas, about twopence, is the price of a large cup of railway tea; a small cup can be obtained for one anna.) I was much affected by this solicitude from a man who did not look too well off and thanked him, but refused the money, saying that I had just had some tea. Alas! I soon had reason to suspect that he knew this already.

He continued to accompany me and confided that he was a *sannyasi* (a general term for one who has renounced the world: home, possessions, family, friends and all worldly ambitions). He was not wearing the characteristic sannyasi dress, or undress, and I had my doubts. He then got to work. 'God is love,' he declared. I did not dispute this, but he repeated it, raising one hand and pointing to the skies, or more exactly to the roof of the station. This proved to be his major premise. He then proceeded to his minor: that I was a 'man of God'. This I ventured neither to affirm nor deny. I have made some slight effort towards becoming a 'man of God'; my dress proclaimed so much; but I would not like to say that I *am* a man of God. However, he gave me no chance of saying *distinguo*, or even *transeat*, but went on immediately to his conclusion, that I could not refuse him the present of a small sum of money; I think a couple of rupees was the precise amount mentioned.

Now logic has never been my strong suit. Even when obliged to admit the inevitability of the conclusion I have often had an uncomfortable feeling that there might be a flaw in the argument, combined with wonder that any human situation could be adequately stated in the form of a minor premise. To my crude judgement it appeared only that he had set a sprat to catch a mackerel and my whole being revolted from acquiescence in what alas! seemed to me just an elaborate hypocrisy. That one gentleman, or even one sannyasi, should accommodate another in a temporary embarrassment: yes, of course; but no, not this. I gently refused. He then drew attention to my evident opulence as shown by the (apparently) costly material of my habit; but I was not moved. I tried to take leave of him, but he

continued to follow me up the platform and through the exit. I ignored him and went to the enquiry office for information regarding the next stage of my journey, hoping I had shaken him off. But no; he now proceeded to give an object lesson in love. He took from his pocket a handkerchief (a western infiltration, this, and not at all characteristic of the sannyasi or even of the ordinary conservative Indian, who has a most effective method of dealing with his nasal organ): he soaked it in water from the drinking-fountain, went down on hands and knees, and began to wash the floor of the station vestibule, at the same time crying out at the top of his voice: 'Le-r-r-ve, le-r-r-ve.'

India has always had a large lunatic fringe and it is typical of Indian tolerance that no one paid the least attention to this manœuvre. I, however, to whom this sort of thing was still new, observed it fascinated from the corner of an eye while affecting to ignore it. He, for his part, was observing me even more closely and pursued me hotly as I concluded my business and made for the street. By this time his artifice had become an unashamed demand for baksheesh, the word which, heard for the first time in the ports of Egypt, continues to sound in the ears as one travels east; though God knows the poor creatures who utter it usually need all, and far more than, they are ever likely to get: and how one would like to be able to meet the reasonable demands of all of them! Unfortunately I have a strong streak of obstinacy in my composition and by this time no power on earth could have moved me to give him a farthing. The more he cried the more obstinate I became. I retreated in the direction of an auto-rickshaw, having several miles to travel to the far side of the cantonment area. He continued to advance. Finally, when I had already boarded the vehicle and he apparently considered further persuasion useless, he raised his voice in a most un-sannyasi-like shriek and exhorted me to 'get out of India'. This was repeated, and there were, I believe, variations on the theme; but these were drowned in the splutter of the engine, and as I sped away he stood shaking a fist and still shrieking.

It might be a slur on the fair name of Poona to leave it at that. About two and a half years later, at precisely the spot where I had escaped from my pursuer, I had an experience which more

than cancelled out the previous one and is more truly typical of India. I had again left the station after enquiring about a train south. (This may give the impression that much of my time was spent in travel on Indian Railways, but in fact this was the very next rail journey I made after returning north and settling at Purandhar.) From twenty yards or so away a middle-aged man gesticulated to attract my attention. He was a Hindu of the old, conservative school, probably of brahmin caste, dressed in spotless, white high-necked tunic, and cotton dhoti drawn between his legs in the approved style in this district, sandals on his feet, and on his head the ubiquitous fore-and-aft white Gandhi cap. 'Excuse me, Father,' he said (one is always 'Father' to the English-speaking Indian, Christian or non-Christian; to the country peasant one is more commonly 'Padre Sahib'). 'Excuse me, Father, a thought just occurred to me as I saw you. How is it possible, I said to myself, how is it possible for a man to rise above self? How can he do it?' His exact meaning was not at first clear to me. I assumed that he had in mind the notion most central of all to eastern religion, of rising from the material world of the senses to the unseen, from *maya* to union with the One, and I sought rapidly in my mind for the short answer. But this was not at all what he meant. Before I could reply he continued: 'How can a man live a life free from self; how can he give up everything and devote himself to others?' I never feel less spiritual and devoted and unselfish than when I am enveloped in the heat, noise, crowds and smells of an Indian town in summer and did wonder for a moment if he was cynical, inferring that not much could be expected from such a one as I obviously was. But no: it was obvious that he was in deadly earnest and really did want to know. I suggested that of oneself one could do little or nothing on these lines; it could be done only by the power of God indwelling and communicating his own strength. (I did not use the word 'grace' in case he was not familiar with it.) This seemed to satisfy and please him. 'Ah!' he replied. 'That's it; that must be it. It would be quite impossible otherwise. Yes, that's the answer. Thank you, Father.' He looked me over again, saluted, and went on his way. I went my own way considerably chastened; it was clear that my habit suggested to him a very high ideal.

Having mentioned auto-rickshaws I should perhaps say that the old hand-drawn rickshaw, the small, high carriage with two large wheels, accommodating two persons (though I have seen as many as four people in one) and pulled at a trot by a coolie, is gradually going out. It is being replaced by the cycle-rickshaw, the driver pedalling in front, or by the auto-rickshaw. This strange creature is in front a motor-scooter, with an engine of 150–200 c.c., and at the back a tiny covered car capable of transporting two people with luggage. The fare is usually the equivalent of about sixpence a mile, though the driver will inevitably demand about three times this amount, gradually, if one has the patience, reducing it to approximately the correct fare. My own method, impatient and no doubt spoiling the fun, was to compute roughly the distance, erring on the generous side, offer the correct amount and depart without argument. These conveyances are very convenient and move quickly, though they have a way of swerving violently as they dart in and out of the traffic, so that one sometimes has to cling to anything available in order to avoid being thrown out.

PURANDHAR FORT

A Benedictine monastic community is ideally, as I have said, a world in miniature, self-sufficient and self-supporting, so far as that is possible, and having but little contact with the world around. It is, however, a fact of experience, that the effect of this is a heightening and concentration of energy and activity, both on the material and spiritual planes within the actual enclosure, and that this does also produce an effect on the surrounding district. Something of its structure, its visible and invisible organization, tends to be reproduced in the lives of the neighbouring people, whether by conscious imitation or unconsciously as an external expression of an unseen spiritual communication. Indians tend to speak of this 'radiation' in terms of 'waves' and 'vibrations',[1] almost as though so many little living models of such a community were being put on the air in every direction to be picked up by anyone who was tuned in to that particular wavelength. But once settled in such

[1] Cf. p. 202.

a community one has little opportunity of travelling and of 'seeing the country'—'for this is by no means expedient for their souls'. This might seem at first a disadvantage, but I have come to think, for reasons to be explained a little later, that it has a considerable advantage, even as a means of coming to know a country and a people: one comes to know them from the inside rather than from a series of deductions from external, superficial knowledge.

I did in fact have to go into Poona occasionally on business, usually about once a month. Sometimes I was able to return the same day, but more often I stayed the night with the Indian and German-Swiss Jesuit Fathers at St. Vincent's. These always received me with the greatest kindness and hospitality; nothing was too much trouble for them, and their house and big high school became the centre of my expeditions in the Poona bazaars. I learned after some time that I had become known there as 'Father Nautilus' (after the American atomic submarine) from my habit—so it was alleged—of surfacing suddenly and unexpectedly, operating at high speed, and just as suddenly disappearing from sight. I have since reflected that had they been Hindus they might possibly have attributed these sudden appearances and disappearances to materializations of the kind I was to hear about later in the Himalayas when trying to trace a man said to be 3,000 years old.

For these expeditions I had to descend the hill at dawn and obtain a lift from the driver of a small, ramshackle, green motor-van which collected milk each day from the neighbouring villages and took it in to the Poona market. Regularly just after dawn a line of peasants, brass milk-can on head, flowed over the shoulder of our hill and down to this waiting car. I was invariably given the place of honour next to the driver while other passengers, sometimes an incredible number of them, squatted about among the milk in the back.

I can remember no other country except Malta where people display quite regularly in both public and private vehicles pictures of their gods and saints, often in India garlanded with flowers and sometimes with lights and incense burning before them. This man's selection included, in the centre, a divinity with three faces and many arms, and on one side a picture of an old man, recently dead but already provided with a halo, to

whose tomb thousands of pilgrims flock daily, so that a special service of buses has to be laid on. I have made no study of his life, but he was described to me by Europeans as 'an immoral old scoundrel with a number of "wives" '; this factor, however, it should be noted, is not to the Indian mind incompatible with the possession of divine power.[1] I mention it as typical of the Indian scene; the rise to sanctity and a kind of deification may be a very rapid process. Gandhiji protested vigorously at attempts to canonize or deify him, and more recently Mr. Nehru has declined with thanks the suggestion that a temple should be built in his honour. Each time I was in Poona I passed, near St. Vincent's High School and close by the cantonment market, the tomb of a Moslem lady who died a few years ago. It is enclosed in a shrine with open front, taking up the whole width of a section of pavement, with an attendant server, incense burning constantly before it, holy water dispensed to devotees and a large chest to receive the monetary offerings of the faithful.

The driver of this milk truck always lit an incense stick before his pictures before starting off, but I could never discover whether this was a daily habit or simply an added precaution in case his gods should not be too well pleased with this unbelieving passenger. However, I have no reason to suppose that this latter was the case, and indeed when we later installed a statue of the Madonna in a small shrine outside our chapel he climbed the hill especially in order to see it, and possibly to pay his respects: one cannot afford to neglect any saint or deity who may exert an influence over human destiny. One is reminded of the Irishman, seen to cross himself and bow reverently every time the Holy Name was mentioned. People, however, came to notice that he did the same when the devil was mentioned

[1] For one arrived at perfect 'realization' there can be no sin. Some modern Hindu writers deny the existence of sin at all—cf. p. 54. Implicit in some traditional Hindu ritual is the notion that sin is attributable not to the Self but only to the particular member or organ involved. In everyday life the maid is likely to say, not that 'it came to pieces in her hand' but that it was her hand, not she, that did it. I think this arises from a desire to emphasize the identity of the Self with God, the body with all its works being illusion rather than the true self. It is, of course, the teaching of Christian theology that sin and evil are something negative—negations of due being or perfection. Cf. also Julian of Norwich: *Revelations* xi.

and asked him about it. He is said to have replied: 'Politeness costs nothing: and you never know.' I noticed that this driver on leaving the ghats (hills) and beginning the long tortuous descent to the Poona plain always made a little bow to the squat, red, stony-eyed idol enthroned in a small shrine on the highest point at one side of the road. Similarly on his return, having made the ascent without mishap, after disposing of his milk successfully, he gave a little bow of what I assumed was thanks.

On my first excursion to Poona I had, through a misunderstanding, to return by the public bus. This runs once a day over one of the world's worst roads to the foot of the hill and, after a wait of half an hour or less, returns to Poona. It was on this occasion that I witnessed a small incident that I realized later might happen anywhere in India. Five miles or so short of Purandhar Hill the bus had to pass through a river, considerably swollen, which was overflowing the road to the depth of a couple of feet or more. Having achieved this the bus stopped and all the passengers alighted. We were experiencing a kind of aftermath of the monsoon and it was raining. I was cold, tired and hungry and entirely uninterested in viewing any more swollen rivers, so I remained in my place hoping they would not stop too long. After a wait of about ten minutes, during which I wondered vaguely what was happening, the body of a child, apparently about ten to twelve years old, was carried in, covered by a wet blanket, and laid out on the seat beside me. The body was followed by a weeping woman, then gradually by the former passengers. At first I was a little disturbed, fearing that while I had been sitting there the child had been drowned in the swollen river and that, with a too ready acceptance of such an incident as the will of God, the body was being carried home without any effort at revival. I have never had to try artificial respiration but was prepared to attempt it if no one else did. However, a second look at the body showed me that it was already stiff and long past the stage of artificial respiration. The other passengers did not understand my language nor I theirs, so I was not able to learn then what had happened. Later I found that the child had been killed by fireworks at Poona—I do not know how he got so far from home—and the body was being brought back to the little cluster of cottages at the foot of Purandhar Hill for burial, this being the common

mode of disposal for the poorer people rather than cremation. It had been transported as far as the river in a private car or cart which had been unable to ford the river; so they had waited for the bus and thus given us an extra passenger. *Diwali*, the great Hindu Feast of Light, at the beginning of November, is celebrated by great detonations of fireworks of an extraordinarily fierce and explosive character which regularly lead to a death roll, and I had met one of the victims: he had died from fire, not water.

These expeditions to Poona were, then, the only occasions, with the exception of that already mentioned, on which I left the community. The others left it still more rarely. It was always pleasant to leave behind on the plain the noise, heat and bustle of the crowded bazaars and, as the truck wound its way upwards, to feel on one's face the fresh breeze that always rose towards evening and played all night round our hill.

There were no other Christians nearer than Poona. Within the fort enclosures lived only the few *chowkidars* (watchmen, caretakers); these quickly became friendly. On the plain below the hill were scattered, some miles apart, small groups of peasant farmers. It is again typical of India that no one in this small monastic community spoke the local language, Marathi, nor even Hindi. I spoke no Indian language; the others, all Indians, had between them besides English, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindustani. When I needed an interpreter I made use of the Hindustani speaker, while he, for his part, had often to employ someone who could translate from the local Marathi into Hindustani. This made it a slow process, especially in view of the fact that it is almost impossible to extract a direct answer from your Indian peasant. To frame one's question carefully so that it requires simply a 'yes' or 'no' is not regarded as playing the game. The result is likely to be a long, complicated and detailed story involving a brief summary of the narrator's ancestry for the past few generations, but without, so far as one could judge, any bearing on the question. Sometimes, when I have been particularly busy, I have left the interpreter with instructions to call me when, if ever, he managed to get the other party round to the point. Moreover one could not always be sure of the final English version presented, though one did, after a time, acquire a kind of sixth sense enabling one to follow

the general drift of what was being tossed backwards and forwards.

We did, however, establish friendly relations with the people of the district. They were already well disposed. The occupation of the fort by the British had brought them many odd jobs and a market for their produce. There had apparently also been such matters as Christmas parties and baksheesh. Supplies had to be carried up the hill on the heads of coolies. Even large barrels of beer for the consumption of thirsty British Tommies were man-handled up, though, I was told, these barrels often arrived at the top lighter, in some mysterious fashion, than when they began their ascent, with the coolies correspondingly heavier and more cheerful. During the war years and the use of the fort as an internment camp, the internees, who included professors and school-teachers, had opened a school for the children of the district, and in consequence there was still one young man, a former pupil now living half-way down the hill, who spoke passable English and was sometimes available as an interpreter.

One curious incident did occur about a week after our arrival which I have never been able to explain. Our cook, a dark-skinned Syrian-rite Christian from Kerala, had noticed a peasant woman occupied in some task a few yards outside our compound. Being curious to know what she was after he went later to look around and found a small sacrificial meal laid out under a bush: a small portion of rice and vegetables on a piece of banana leaf, half a lime and an egg. This last item could, for a peasant, involve a real measure of sacrifice. I have known an old man of about seventy walk several miles from his village and climb the hill with one egg for sale, the market value of this being at most twopence. A little further search revealed another similar meal; both were at strategic points apparently aimed in some way at our enclosure. My Indian confrères were unable to explain it, and discreet enquiries outside produced no satisfactory answer. My confrères told me that such an offering is never made except to some visible representation or symbol of the deity; even a stone daubed with red ochre will suffice, but there must be something. Here nothing was visible. The position of these sacrifices suggested some connection with us, and one can only suggest that they were either

intended to placate whatever strange powers might dwell in these Christian sadhus or part of a rite with the purpose of driving us away—'you never know'.

It has always seemed to me that the best way of coming to know a country and a people, especially an eastern people with modes of thought so very different from those of the West, is to choose one spot and there, under living conditions very similar to those of the people, to sit down and absorb and assimilate one's surroundings; or, by a different metaphor, to grow into them until one is in tune with it all. The alternative is to move about here, there and everywhere, meeting as many people as possible and covering as much ground as one can by modern transport in the time at one's disposal, and then to sit down, reflect on one's experiences and draw conclusions. By the first method one works from the inside outwards, acquiring first a sort of conformation to the soul of the people and so coming to see how the externals of their lives are the natural, material expression of this. The second way, to be successful, requires a very long and comprehensive study of the externals, and, in the case of a westerner studying the East, it must always be extraordinarily difficult for him to co-ordinate such a mass of knowledge and to draw from it the right conclusions. It could, of course, be argued that by the former method one might come to know a certain restricted area intensively without gaining any knowledge of a country or people as a whole, but I believe that in practice this is not so. Variations in different districts are usually seen to be variations in degree rather than in kind, and a reasonably complete knowledge of even one man is the key to an understanding of all others. This is the conclusion I have arrived at by experience, not *a priori*.

There is another aspect of the matter. In fact by remaining static one does meet a great variety of people from widely separated districts under circumstances in which they tend to be more communicative and oneself is attuned to study and learn from them. One is reminded here of G. B. Shaw's astonishment at the depth and scope of the knowledge of men and affairs shown by the late Abbess of Stanbrook who passed, if I remember rightly, direct from her Lanarkshire home to the Worcestershire Abbey, first as a pupil in the school and then as a nun. 'You may be an enclosed nun,' he told her, 'but you certainly

haven't an enclosed mind.' She had, of course, from behind her grill, met a great variety of people from every walk of life under conditions that made her peculiarly receptive. In matters of factual knowledge of topical events it has been said, jokingly yet with a certain substratum of truth, that the best place to get the latest news is a convent of enclosed nuns.

However, I am thinking primarily of the contact between soul and soul which is an undoubted fact, however one may explain the mechanics of it, yet requires a fairly high degree of retirement and withdrawal from external phenomena for its development. After that is the fact of living in the same environment of climate, clothing, food and shelter that contributes—one would not like to place it higher than that—to the formation of a certain character and outlook. Here, as I have said, I was the only European; I think there were no others nearer than Poona. I would place last of all the casual contacts with visitors from the outside world which allowed one to compare, check and extend the impressions already received.

'MEDICAL MONK'

No matter how thick and high the wall with which one surrounds oneself, sooner or later chinks appear in it. So it was here; I soon found myself in almost daily contact with the Indian peasant. Most of the European missionaries here, as in other missionary countries, have combined a little unofficial medical practice with their pastoral charge. Many of them play safe and use homoeopathic remedies which, if they should do no good, at least can do no harm. I was not a missionary in the accepted sense of undertaking active pastoral work, but I have no doubt the distinction was lost on most people. One day the wife of one of the chowkidars came with her small daughter, a child of about three years, to ask for help. The child had a skin disease which irritated constantly and so, apart from the superficial effects, was affecting her general health. It was probably scabies, very common here especially during the monsoon when the peasants are not able to air their clothing and bedding, but I did not know this at the time since it does not take the form characteristic of this disease in the West. However, my treatment was successful and there was a notable

improvement in a few days. The good news was passed round and soon there was a regular procession of people from miles around with a great variety of skin diseases. Many of them were children, some a mass of sores and scabs from head to foot. In some cases, I discovered, they had already tried the local holy man without result, and now, having found that sanctity did not work, had turned to me.

I remember one little brown baby (only a minor case, this) carried by the mother, with the father also in attendance. There was in fact no disease here; it was a plump, bright, healthy child, but with unusually deep skin folds in the neck. These had become sore and were now raw and festering, and the inflammation was spreading up into the child's head. The condition had become worse through the application of some strange medicament obtained locally. At first I hesitated to accept any responsibility for this; it looked so unpleasant and I was afraid of possible infection of the sores in such a small child. I asked how old the child was. The father replied (it is always the father who replies; the mother usually follows St. Paul's injunction and remains silent): 'Eighteen months.' I said: 'Oh, that's impossible,' and asked the mother. She said: 'Six months,' which seemed to me about right and I accepted it. People here rarely know their age, since they do not celebrate birthdays, but in cases such as this I have sometimes wondered if they may have been reckoning fron conception rather than from birth. I soon ceased trying to discover ages and made my own assessment except in cases where the age, within a few years, might be an important factor in diagnosing a trouble. Women age rapidly here and after their teens it is often not easy to guess their age; but neither sex seems to reach maturity noticeably earlier than in colder climates, contrary to the idea current in the West.

In this case it was simply a matter of a celibate sadhu demonstrating to a young mother how to dry and powder the folds of a baby's neck. As a small boy I had watched with great interest this being done to a younger brother. I rolled up my sleeves, prepared a bowl of warm antiseptic solution and cotton wool and proceeded to clean up the neck and dry it thoroughly. There was in the house a tin of boracic, zinc and starch powder, and with this I powdered carefully all the folds of the baby's

neck, handing the remainder over to the mother with instructions to go and do likewise. After struggling like an eel during the operation the baby now sat perfectly still, stared at me for what seemed a full minute in open-eyed and open-mouthed amazement, then gave a broad grin and proceeded to become very friendly. I instructed them to bring the child back in three days and by this time the skin was completely healed.

Having been tried out in skin diseases I was tested in a large variety of other troubles, and sometimes had as many as twenty people waiting for attention, often to the disorganization of my routine duties. When I met something unusual I consulted the Medical Mission Sisters at their dispensary in Poona, presided over by one of those incomparable Irish sisters who are to be found in every quarter of the globe with their ready wit and that peculiarly Celtic combination of almost fanatical otherworldliness with sound common sense. Commonly it was a limited number of diseases, well known to these sisters, with which one had to deal, and there was a regular, accepted treatment. Having met and recognized the disease once it was not difficult to diagnose it a second time. T.B. cases were the most discouraging. There was really nothing one could do, though naturally one did not say so and gave what advice one could. The number of beds available for hospital treatment in India was an infinitesimal fraction of the number needed, and it was useless even prescribing a diet that would have helped since this was quite beyond their means. The ordinary peasant with whom I came mostly into contact, though his diet was quite unbalanced and inadequate, is not in fact the poorest of the population. Even so I always felt that the real cure for most of their ailments was a good square meal three times a day, or even once a day; but they could not obtain this and I was not in a position to supply it. It was a strain on our meagre finances to find medicines for them and occasional vitamin tablets for the children.

I was never sure what opinion they really had of my remedies. It would be typical of the Indian mentality to regard them as merely the external, material symbols through which they came in contact with invisible spiritual powers which were the real healing agents, analogous to the scholastic *sacramentum* as distinguished from the *res sacramenti*. This, I suggest, was their

real attitude. It was probably the explanation of occasional incidents that irritated me at the time. One day, for instance, two quite small children were brought to me by men camping out on the hillside with their families. (They were doing temporary work, cutting a long-leafed cactus which is then pulled into shreds and woven into rope.) One child had a bad cough; I have forgotten what was the trouble with the second. Now, it happened that they arrived just before the short office (service) in church at noon which precedes the mid-day meal, after which there is a period of free time. Preparation of medicine for this small child involved boiling water and mixing with it *jaggery* (solidified juice of the palmyra palm) to make it palatable. In order not to disorganize our routine I asked them, since they were only a few minutes' walk away, to come or send for medicine in a couple of hours' time. I gave the children a couple of sweets and all went off quite happily, promising to return later. They would in fact have been equally happy to sit and wait for a couple of hours, had I chosen to ask this; their patience in such matters is almost infinite. But they never returned. The medicine, duly prepared, was kept for them and eventually used for another similar case. I do not think this was just negligence. Later experience has led me to think that the actual medicine was to them the least important, perhaps a purely subsidiary, factor. The main thing was that they had had audience of the 'doctor'; he had touched the children and shown a desire to heal them; in this case he had even given them something, sweets, that might surely serve as a vehicle of his healing power: was it really worth while to go back for the medicine?

In my case there was the additional factor that I was a species (no doubt the lowest) of 'holy man'; I was a priest of the Christian religion, one with a special direct relationship to God. Moreover we lived on a hill by the side of a 'temple'. A hill is to the Hindu a holy place. His gods, when they are localized, are born in, or even of, the highest hills of all, the Himalayas. A pilgrimage to a hill shrine is always expected to win some measure of divine favour. To have had *darshan* (audience) in this case of a minor man of God at this hill temple, to have received from him something that could be taken and consumed—what more could one want? If it was God's will, the children would get better; if they did not get better it would

also be God's will: the right approach had been made. By contrast it was always difficult and often quite impossible to persuade them to go to the local hospital, when I met a case that was beyond me or that required hospital treatment. They always begged for something, anything, even though I realized and told them that I had not the medicine they required. If I appear to digress in retailing such incidents I repeat that I do so because they seem to me to form the necessary background to what I tried to find later in the Himalayas, and were my own preparation for it.

That Hindus and Moslems should approach a Christian priest in this way should not surprise the reader; it is typical. Not all among the great crowds that flock to services in Catholic churches are Christians, and this is more particularly true in the case of special devotions to a particular saint or of a pilgrimage. Many, sometimes even the majority, may be Hindus and Moslems. On the outside west wall of the busy Bombay city church where I have begun to write this while awaiting my ship, at a crossroads, its base washed by a seething mass of vehicles and humanity amid a turmoil that dies down only for a bare three hours in the early morning, is fixed on one side a large realistic coloured crucifix, and on the other, in a niche, a coloured statue of the Madonna with a halo of small electric lights. The parish priest, my kind and most generous host, tells me that these receive as much veneration from non-Christians as from Christians. Lights and incense burn before them; usually they are decked with garlands of flowers, mostly by Hindus; people kneel or stand before them in prayer, usually, in the Indian Christian manner (though not confined to India), touching them then putting hand to lips. Sometimes he has seen well-dressed Hindus, when about to pass the church, unbuttoning their jackets or tunics, so that on reaching the church they could then rebutton them and in so doing bow without making this act of reverence too obvious. (This priest is, of course, an Indian, who can be trusted to understand his countrymen.) On occasions when the lights of the halo had been temporarily extinguished through a fuse or similar accident, Hindus have phoned to him begging that they should be relit and offering money in case it was a shortage of cash that had led to an economy in lighting.

From such people as these, then, who carried their sick up the hill, from other casual visitors, and perhaps most of all from the central fact of living in constant, hourly contact with the Indians of the community, I think I gradually gained a deeper insight into the Indian mind than I might have done from a more superficial and distracted contact with a wider circle. Further, once one has accepted the fact of God and a divine guidance of human affairs, one is obliged logically to go further and admit that all the so-called casual contacts with men and things, and the spoken and written word of men, have a specially designed part in the development of the individual or contribute to his work; even although at the time one may not be able to discern clearly their purpose and although one's life may lack the harmony and rhythm necessary for these to produce their full effect. I shall later suggest that a recognition of this and the consequent acceptance of the events of life as elements of a deliberate plan in one's regard is basic to the Indian mentality, even though it may at times verge on fatalism, or quietism.

As a corollary to this may I say that I have constantly found in my own experience that whatever I have needed for a particular work of the moment has been found on consideration to be already at hand. Further, over and over again when engaged in writing an article or such-like, usually far from a library, I have come across, apparently quite accidentally, just the illustration, the new slant, the reference to new studies, that I have needed at the moment. Working under apparently ideal conditions I might have searched and studied for years in the same subject without this particular insight that I required at the moment. On the other hand I have sometimes to my embarrassment found in learned articles, in periodicals just received, ideas that I had expressed in almost identical language some months previously in articles not then published. This was borne in upon me especially when, after the first heavy work of putting the place in order, I was able to devote a couple of hours a day to a regular task of study and writing. I had discovered for myself what I shall suggest in more detail later as one of the fundamental ideas of Hinduism, in so far as that can be defined at all.

MONASTIC LIFE

The life we were living in this very small community (in the beginning only four people) followed a fairly strict interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict, an alternation, that is, of prayer, work and study co-ordinated by the 'hours' of the divine office performed in choir as solemnly as our small numbers permitted, the whole revolving round the daily conventual mass. We rose for the night office at 2.40 a.m., and the other hours were celebrated at approximately the correct canonical times. There was a light breakfast of tea (or coffee) with bread and butter, taken standing; the bread being wholemeal, for which we bought wheat and had it ground at the local mill. The main meal came after the midday office of sext, at about 12.10. There was a bowl of tea at 4.30 and a light supper at 6.15. In observance of the Rule and in respect for the Indian prejudice against the killing of animals we always abstained from flesh meat, but for this reason it was important that our diet, which was entirely Indian, should be regulated properly. For instance I found it impossible to buy unpolished rice in the bazaars, and it was necessary to buy locally the 'paddy', rice with the hard husk still on it, and then get this husk removed by hand. This is a heavy job—the rice is pounded by a heavy weight on the end of a stick—usually done by women, as are so many of the heavy jobs in the East, and had to be supervised in order to see that only sufficient pounding was given to remove the hard husk without at the same time taking away the (commonly red) valuable skin of the rice.

We retired to bed after compline which began at 7.15 p.m. Going to bed so early, when it is still light and so sleep is difficult, can be a problem in northern and southern latitudes. The tropics are kind in this respect if not in others. The sun sets and rises throughout the year at approximately the same time, between the hours of six and seven. In the Poona area there is not more than one hour's variation between winter and summer in this respect, so that it was always dark when we went to bed; dark except for the myriad stars in the wide arc of sky visible from this mountain fortress and the brilliant tropical moonlight flooding the plain below and revealing strange patterns in the configuration of the surrounding hills. There

was no regular period of recreation in the sense of meeting together for conversation; silence was observed throughout the day, but when work made communication necessary then we did use the God-given faculty of speech.

Such a life is, contrary to the popular conception, a very full and active one; it may in fact easily become too busy and distracting in a very small community such as ours. In addition to being superior, choirmaster and holder of the money-bags (not that there was ever much to hold), I was also the odd-job man; and in such buildings, falling into ruin when we arrived, the number of odd jobs necessary to make them habitable and to keep them in repair is legion. Our cook, a man of good caste and a good cook, though inclined to be a bit haphazard in his methods and temperamentally incapable of keeping his kitchen tidy, seemed to take a delight in finding me rather unusual jobs, perhaps just as a test of my ability. Malayalam, the language of Kerala, was his native tongue, but he spoke and read some English. On one occasion he came to me to complain that his watch was 'one week and ten minutes slow' (possibly by way of creating an alibi should meals happen to be rather late). At first I was a little taken aback and began hastily to review my ideas of space and time. After all, a watch only registers twelve hours and that it was possible for a watch to be a week slow was to me an entirely novel conception. However, on my demanding to hear more of this, and in particular over what period he had observed this unusual phenomenon, it appeared that what he really meant was that his watch had lost ten minutes in one week.

My own 'contemplative' life was thus often far from contemplative in fact, and I do not think anyone could justly have labelled us 'lazy monks'. Even when I did try to settle to a regular period of reading and study I was seldom left undisturbed for long. There were frequent interruptions, often from people who came to sell eggs or occasionally vegetables, more often from the sick. I well remember one small girl who sometimes brought eggs for sale, never more than three or four, the market value of these being between fivepence and sevenpence. She was very dirty, very talkative and very cross-eyed, and I always heard her, her voice raised in shrill bargaining with the cook, long before I saw her. Should she fail to find the cook she

was liable to stand outside my door and shout 'Sahib, Sahib' until something happened—but there was a vigour, independence and vivacity about her that I admired for all her talkative ten or so years. The coins given in payment were always scrutinized carefully one by one, and sometimes one was rejected as not coming up to her numismatic standards. Sometimes she brought with her a still smaller brother, equally dirty and dressed in a very short shirt and nothing more. This was, in fact, one short shirt more than some of them wear; yet somehow a small boy completely naked has an air of being much more adequately clothed than one in only a very abbreviated shirt or cutty-sark.

I would not be misunderstood here. It is only very small boys, and rarely small girls, who may be seen playing about naked, and then as a rule only in country districts. Once grown up they are very careful of their modesty, though at all ages they will quite unashamedly, at least the lower classes of men, relieve themselves in the public streets. Yet not only the lower classes: I have known a teachers' training college and high school where adequate sanitary conveniences were provided, yet within four yards of the doors of the classrooms were innumerable small piles of human excrement. I can only suppose that the fierce heat of the sun has the effect of killing germs that might otherwise cause epidemics. In this same connection I have often wondered how Indians are able to bathe in water, wash their clothes in it, water their animals, run their latrines into it (where these do exist) and finally drink it with impunity.

I shall not labour this point nor add any of the harrowing experiences that occur to mind to illustrate it, but no picture of India would be complete without some mention of this aspect of life. As one slight trace of a subtle perfume may recall a whole chapter in one's life, so surely in the memory of anyone who has travelled there a malodorous haze must always obscure in some degree the glamour of the East. Again I must not be taken as meaning more than I say, or of suggesting that this must be allowed to weigh too heavily in the balance—it is not so long since the streets of Europe were immeasurably worse than any I have seen in the East today—only that in my case, as undoubtedly in the experience of many others, it has often made me feel very ill.

To return to this matter of clothing. The small boy may soon acquire a sort of small cloth pouch suspended in the front from a string. Later he wears most commonly these days a pair of cotton shorts, with or without a shirt—worn, of course, outside the trousers—or long, striped pyjama trousers. I have spoken here of the country boy; the town boy normally wears western dress; but I have seen, walking up and down the platform of a busy railway station, a big boy of fourteen or so wearing nothing at all but this little cotton pouch, with a folded blanket carried over one shoulder. I did, however, receive the impression that he was slightly self-conscious about it, and the impression was strengthened by the air with which he puffed away at one of the cheap Indian cigarettes—a small elongated cone of leaf (not tobacco leaf) into which is rolled shredded tobacco: a packet of twenty can be bought for about twopence. This boy was well-built and fair-skinned and was probably from one of the tribal areas where live tribes still 'uncivilized', quite separate and apart from the rest of the inhabitants of the subcontinent, with their own quite distinctive, highly organized customs, religion and way of life. There is, of course, a species of sadhu or 'holy man' who go about entirely naked except for this pouch, numerous rows of beads round their necks, and face and body smeared with white ash which gives them a ghastly appearance, to be seen sometimes in the cities; but their manner of dress is a matter of religion and accepted as such.

Such, then, were the interruptions that accompanied my attempts at study, contemplation and in general probing into the higher mysteries. I did, however, during the last twelve months make a real effort to get a couple of hours a day at some solid study. It was only during this period, and not fully until near the end of it, that there came the realization that the particular line of study I was engaged on, pursued in this particular milieu, even with these interruptions rather than in spite of them, was perhaps the very best way in which I could come to an understanding of the deep sources of Indian religion, and, because a people's culture springs from their religion, of Indian culture also.

PSEUDO-DENYS

For many years I had been interested in the works of the author now commonly known as the *Pseudo-Denys*, formerly as *Denys the Areopagite*. He claims to be the Denys who became a disciple of St. Paul after listening to his discourse on the Unknown God on the rock of the Areopagus in Athens;[1] he is now generally considered to have been a Syrian writing in Greek about the end of the fifth century. Assuming that the text we have today is the one he wrote, it seems certain from internal evidence that it could not have been written before that date and it was well known soon after. This small body of works, a harmony of philosophy, theology and mysticism, has perhaps exerted a greater influence than any others except those of St. Paul himself on all subsequent spiritual and mystical writing. Perhaps my interest was largely due to the fact that I had fallen under the spell of Plato during my classics course, and of Plato I was later to find Maximus Confessor, the commentator of the Pseudo-Denys, asking: 'What else is Plato but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?' But if the mantle of Moses had fallen on Plato, what is to be said of the Pseudo-Denys in whose writings all that Plato was feeling after is shown as fulfilled by the Christian revelation?

For this writer all things are 'manifestations' of God in decreasing degrees of perfection, the visible creation with man at its head being the lowest in the scale. God himself is utterly transcendent, beyond all that we can affirm or deny of him. He is unknowable, yet is known in all things; is nothing that is, yet at the same time he is everything in everything and thus is the object of our reason, touch, sensation, imagination. The vehemence—for that is the word for it—with which the transcendence of God is asserted is nicely balanced by the continual reiteration of the statement that it is God who is the beginning of all things.

Following St. John in this the author finds it most convenient, in describing the work of creation and conservation, to speak of God in terms of light, of light manifesting itself in varying degrees of concentration and brilliance. (To appreciate the full force of this the reader should know that, in the mind of

[1] *Acts* xvii. 22 ff.

the ancients, light diffused itself without suffering any loss or change in itself.) M. Gilson describes this very neatly: 'The Divine Light and the being which it confers are the illuminative cascade whose steps are described by the treatises *On Celestial Hierarchy* and *On Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. This "illumination" must not be conceived as a simple gift of light to already existing beings, but as the gift of a light which *is* their very being.'[1] Moreover the higher orders contain all that is in those beneath them and the lower orders are, for their part, but a less intense, because more diffused, form of all that is in those above them, imitating them in every way. All are, so to speak, in the same 'shape' or pattern, increasingly imperfect images or manifestations of the Light that is God. In this sense is to be understood the statements above that God is transcendent, unknowable and incomprehensible, yet known and touched in all things.

I was particularly interested in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in which are described the lower reaches, as it were, of the 'illuminative cascade', where it assumes visible material form: the sacraments, priesthood and people (in that order) of the divine institution known as the Catholic Church. So far as I have been able to discover there is not at present in print any English translation of this work, though several translations of the other treatises have appeared recently; yet its great value is obvious for a deeper understanding of the true nature of the Church's liturgical worship and sacramental system at a time when this is being studied more intensively than ever before. I had already made a rough translation in English: with difficulty since the original Greek is not easy to obtain and for a number of years I had been living at a distance from a good library. Realizing that in India access to a text was likely to be still more difficult I had taken advantage of a delay in negotiations for my passage to India by going through my translation again and making a series of notes with the help of the text of Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* in the John Rylands Library at Manchester. In consequence I was now able to take this up again with the ultimate

[1] *History of Christian Philosophy of the Middle Ages*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1955, p. 83. It should be noted that in 'their very being' is included their activity, present and future, all that they have and do or are going to do, including in the case of intelligent beings their freedom of will to do it or not to do it. There is 'nothing that they have not received'.

intention of preparing an introduction and commentary on this treatise.

These works are not easy reading; St. Thomas Aquinas found them difficult and obscure. In order to penetrate their meaning it is necessary not so much to reason on them as to immerse oneself in their thought, allow oneself to be possessed by the ideas and conceptions evoked. It was in the course of this work that it gradually dawned upon me that my mind was being formed by it in a mould that was fundamentally that of eastern philosophy and religion in general (it is not really possible to distinguish the two in this context) and especially of Hindu philosophy; remembering that this was also the cast of thought of the Western Church, Platonist rather than Aristotelian, down to the dawn of modern times. At the time these works were composed East and West still spoke a common language: I mean that their thought and its manner of expression were mutually intelligible. The Christian revelation presented in such a form might readily have been welcomed by the peoples of the East as the fulfilment and crown of their own aspirations and have formed the basis of a single world-wide religion and culture, identical in essentials, with infinite variety in its accidental local forms. In fact, however, East and West drifted further and further apart; and this divergence was undoubtedly accelerated by an increasing inability in the West to understand and appreciate the true nature of its own liturgical worship, the external expression of the life of its own soul.

I had, of course, known this before, but it came to me now, under these circumstances, with a new significance. I felt that in this reading I was studying the true nature of Hinduism itself and was seeing written clearly in one harmonious cosmic whole all that the ancient *rishis* had struggled to express. The early Christian apologists, Justin Martyr in particular, had already evolved a theory that God had given a partial revelation of himself to all nations and this remained to find its fulfilment in the full revelation of Christ. The Pseudo-Denys says much the same: The Light—God described as such—offers itself to all without discrimination; men may open or close their eyes to it. More precisely elsewhere he thinks that revelation was offered to the nations but only the Jews accepted it. The context suggests he means that others rejected it as nations, but

individuals received and receive it: a light that, followed faithfully, would lead them on to the acceptance of the full revelation in Christ.

Christ is, in fact, the definitive word here—The Incarnation, in contrast to the innumerable Hindu incarnations; transcendent God who is also for ever fully man; who is even, it can be said, all men; since all men, their cosmos, their world with its complete ecology, receive their whole being from him. Without loss or change in himself he gives his life and being to the whole hierarchy beneath him. Man, through union with Christ, stands as a microcosm between God and the visible creation and already possesses, at least radically, that universal dominion over it which is the dream of the yogi. It is through the sacraments, the *mysteries*, that man is initiated into this hierarchy. It is not, therefore, surprising that de Nobili's brahmin converts of the seventeenth century accepted his teaching with avidity, believing that they were to be initiated into higher mysteries: as indeed they were.

I shall not attempt here a sketch of the Christian revelation as expounded by the Pseudo-Denys, but it should be useful to the reader to know so much, his spirit and line of approach, in order to follow the drift of my own enquiries later.

'LOOKING FOR AN HONEST MAN'

I sat, then, on my hilltop reflecting on all this and wondering: Where do I go from here? I had already decided to leave this present little Indian community to stand on its own feet and continue free of foreign control. I had in the meantime been asked by the bishop of another diocese if I could do anything to help in obtaining a community of contemplative monks for him. The site mentioned as preferable was a small estate some four thousand feet up in the foothills of the Himalayas by the shores of a lake in the little triangle formed by the conjunction of the borders of Nepal and Tibet.

The Himalayas have always been traditionally the abode of sadhus, monks, yogis, sannyasis and other 'holy men'; and of the half million or so sadhus wandering through India at the present day (there are no reliable statistics; I have recently seen the number estimated at 750,000) there are probably few who

would not claim to have spent some time in the Himalayas. Although there is no principle involved and there are notable exceptions, Benedictine monks have also traditionally tended to choose the tops of hills for their abodes. 'Benedict likes the hills, Bernard (i.e. Cistercians) the valleys' runs the old tag; but I doubt if even Bernard would have chosen the plains of India in preference to the hills. With a summer temperature varying between 115° and 118° in the shade and rising at times into the 120's, they are not conducive to prayer, study, spiritual elevation or manual work, or indeed to anything beyond patient submission to a warm time. It was a matter of surprise to me that the native Indians seemed to feel the heat as much as, if not more than, white people born abroad, though I had noticed the same in the case of coloured African troops working in the Mediterranean area during the last war. Possibly Europeans have a residue of energy that enables them to withstand the climate more easily. Anyway there are already sufficient elements of asceticism in the monastic life without positively looking for trouble, and so in this case the hills seemed a wiser choice.

I had written on the bishop's behalf to a number of monastic communities, Benedictine, Cistercian, Carthusian, some of whom I knew personally, explaining his wishes and needs and the scope in India for such a monastic house. All except one, from whom I received no reply, were very sympathetic, but felt that their circumstances and present commitments, usually shortage of numbers, made a foundation impossible. One does not always take 'no' for an answer and I thought my best plan might be to return to Scotland, visiting on the way one or two of the more likely Benedictine communities on the Continent that I had known in my student days. If I found one prepared to make the attempt and they needed help, I would be ready to offer my services. I felt it would not be practicable under the circumstances—and in India they are extremely complex—to start off another community single-handed and without resources. The entry of a novice into the monastic life has about it something of a sacramental character. He comes to a community which is a family with an organization, a routine and an orientation reproducing on a small scale the essential elements of the Church as a whole. Into this he is, as it were, baptized and initiated. It is—and this is vividly symbolized by the rites

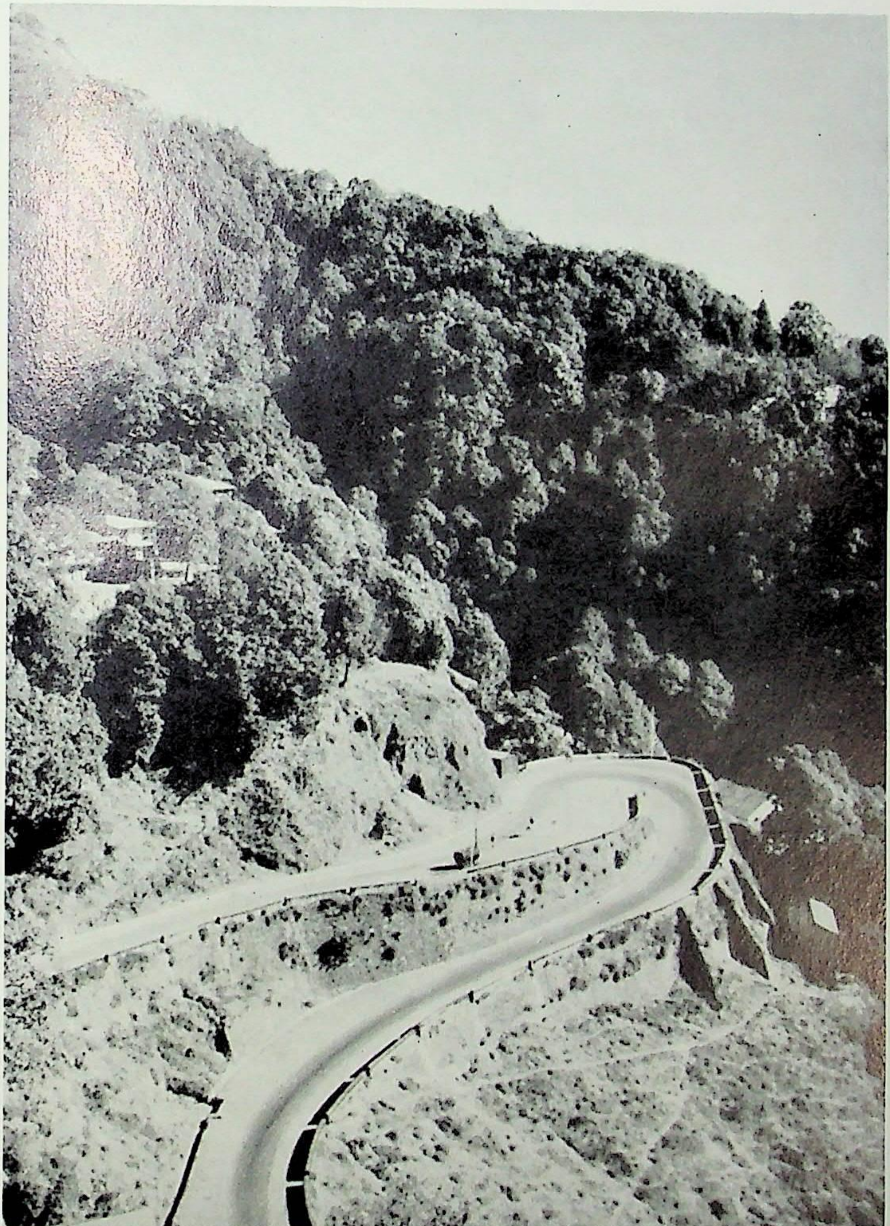
attending solemn profession—a death and a rising again to a new life, with a new dress and a new name, the world to come already present on this earth. Now this presumes at least a small community already in existence, and it is difficult to see how otherwise an aspirant is to receive this initiation and subsequent development. Consequently I have always held, at least in theory—I am always ready to try anything—that the establishment of a new community requires at least a dozen monks. It is true that St. Benedict himself did begin, in the classic manner of the time (still the classic manner of the Indian monk), as a hermit who was more or less forced into the situation of being a *guru* or teacher of others, around whom gathered a little band of disciples, with doubtless at first a very loose and elastic organization. But the organization he left to posterity as the ripe fruit of his own experience was as we have described. Besides I am not a St. Benedict.

In making a decision it is reassuring to have some indication of the will of God. Newman held that at a crisis of one's life one might reasonably expect to receive some clear indication of what one ought to do. It is a fact of experience that such indications are not always forthcoming and that at the time one often has to act with just the ordinary assistance of prudence (which is also extraordinary in being a supernatural virtue), while only afterwards may one be able in the event to detect the direction of God; and I believe that not infrequently decisions that appeared later to be, judged by human standards, mistaken and wrong decisions are turned to our good, serve towards the ultimate end and so were, perhaps after all, dictated by prudence and the gift of counsel. Even, then, if I did not see clearly where I was to go from here, at least I thought I saw the first step. There was a certain obligation to do all I could to respond to this request for assistance. I would return overland through Europe from the Mediterranean and talk personally about this scheme to the superiors of one or two monasteries I knew, but first I would go carefully over the site suggested and estimate its possibilities, so that I could speak from first-hand knowledge.

This is really how my expedition began. It had this immediate practical end, and thinking it over it seemed to me to offer an opportunity also of gaining a deeper knowledge of India. This would have a practical value should I return to India; in any

case it is part of a reasonable man to enquire into the nature of things. It would also be useful to remain in the country for a short time after leaving this present small community in case any problems arose that needed sorting out. I had seen very little of India and in fact care little for mere sight-seeing. I always have to travel with a purpose. At one period of my life the first objects that presented themselves to view through the flaps of my tent when I awoke in the morning were the Great Pyramids of Egypt. I have always been fascinated by the hieratic character of the ancient culture of Egypt and could willingly have spent a life-time studying and investigating it, yet I have to record that, although every day for several weeks I passed by these same pyramids, I never went right up to them, still less penetrated inside. I had always a definite, immediate object, some business or job of work on hand when I passed, and I never seemed able to turn from my course for the few minutes that might have been very fruitful and could hardly have had any serious effect on my work. I am conscious that this is a great limitation and restriction, possibly arising from some subconscious inhibition, and I have probably missed much because of it: but so it is. Even now, when one might have said there was some obligation for an educated man to learn something about the country he had been living in, I was interested not so much in the art, architecture, literature, dress, food and social habits of the country—though all this I do find absorbingly interesting—as in the inner vital force from which all this sprang, in 'what made it tick', if one may be pardoned the expression.

There can be no doubt that for the Hindu this vital force has its origin in the Himalayas, and this belief is embodied in the numerous legends of Hindu gods with their birth in these remote fastnesses in the region of eternal snow. Further, their 'saints' and 'holy men', who are in this view the literal incarnation and embodiment of this force, containing indeed within them the essence of all that is, all find here their spiritual home, and it was obviously here that I must look. Clearly one might spend a whole lifetime studying the Hindu sacred books and commentaries on them without arriving at any more certain conclusion than the innumerable Hindu schools of philosophy themselves. On the other hand an infinite series of reincarnations would hardly be sufficient for a detailed comprehensive



1. Motor road from Dehra Dun to Mussoorie.



2. Trivandrum—monk in meditation before sacred tree.

study and collation of Hindu religious practices. And I had only a few weeks remaining if I was to consider my present work in India at an end.

It seemed to me, therefore, that I could best use this brief period in trying to see something of Hinduism in practice. In particular, if I could meet a few, or even one, of the great saints and mystics that India claims to breed in such large numbers, I might expect to find in him the living embodiment of Hinduism. I might look into him much as his mother looked into the open mouth of the infant Krishna and saw there the whole world; so in a few moments gain a deeper insight into Hinduism—and through that into the soul of India herself—than in many incarnations by study. It is, in any case, a basic canon of Hinduism that one can advance in the spiritual life only under the guidance of a guru.

It is necessary here to remind oneself of India's religious claims—or aspirations: there is a difference, as we shall see later. Hinduism claims to be the most comprehensive and most spiritual of all religions, containing in one great final synthesis all that is true in other religions. The argument used, for instance, when I was discussing a certain point with an Indian monk (I forget what the point was) and expressed a doubt whether this particular point of Christian belief could be held by Hindus, was that they *must* hold it 'because Hinduism contains all that is true in all religions'. He knew nothing about the point in question; it was sufficient that it was an article of Christian belief; Hinduism must therefore contain it—'everything that you can do I can do better', so to speak. This is, it is obvious, a very large claim, but on this hypothesis one might reasonably expect such a religion to produce in considerable numbers examples of the highest spirituality, approaching, if not achieving, sheer sanctity. The West has in general tended to accept this claim of the East to be pre-eminently the home of the mystic, the holy man and the wonder-worker and to acquiesce in the legend of its own comparative materialism and earthiness. I was prepared to approach the question with an open mind, to find what I could find.

In the minds of Indians themselves it was in the Himalayas that I might expect to find the highest, most spiritual manifestation of this religion, as it was there that I must seek its

origin. Its lower, more popular and material expression would be found more easily in the 'sacred cities' and centres of pilgrimage, and its most external periphery in the life of the ordinary people in the villages and great modern cities. I would, then, combine a visit to the proposed site of a new Benedictine monastery with a search for the authentic spirit of Hinduism, following it from its popular expression in the city to its source in the Himalayas. Above all I would look for its highest expression, a true yogi. I would, like another Diogenes, wandering with his lamp at noonday through the streets of Athens, peering into people's faces and 'looking for an honest man', go wandering through the Himalayas (or as much of them as I could reach) looking for an honest yogi. By a wilder flight of imagination I might almost imagine myself a minor edition of John Cassian searching for pearls of spiritual wisdom among the monks of the Egyptian desert.

The epithet 'honest' is perhaps the operative one in the phrase 'honest yogi'. Of the half million or more sadhus roaming the roads of India it is inevitable that some should be frauds and others more concerned with making a living than with progress in the spirit. In general they are not in high favour with the more 'respectable', particularly the more westernized, modern Indian; but this is not necessarily to their discredit. It is certain that there are many among them who are exceptionally good, sincere, earnest men, truly seeking God at considerable cost to themselves in terms of the things of this world. It is also true that some of them suffer from spiritual pride—their philosophy tends to produce this—and are haughty, arrogant men, though I met far fewer of this type than I was led to expect. I was not primarily interested in any of these and their variations. I wanted to find some, or at least one, true yogi, one who had attained to 'realization', to union with God, one who had achieved, in the western terminology, some degree of that sanctity which is removed by a great gulf from mere goodness; always assuming that I was not able to find one who had reached perfect realization, perfect sanctity, for such is the implication of the word yogi. It would hardly be reasonable to expect one who was a true yogi to own up to it, and indeed one of the better swamis I met did tell me that one could never say one had achieved complete realization; still there are

plenty who assert that this state is comparatively common, and one of these, surely, could direct me to a true yogi.

There seemed, however, to be some doubt about this. A Christian Indian priest of brahmin caste, a man of keen intellect who was making a special study of Hinduism and, in order to know it from the inside, had placed himself under a Hindu guru at one of the principal centres of Hindu culture, told me: 'You will not find a yogi [meaning, of course, a true yogi in the sense I have defined]. You will meet people who know others who have met one, but you will not meet one yourself. The search will be worth while; you will learn much in the process; but you will not find a yogi.' In a way this was discouraging: on the other hand, like so many other people, I have only to be told I cannot do something and immediately I conceive a great desire to do it, and more often than not I find I can. In any case, even to have proved that one cannot find a yogi would be something. Perhaps I should add that my Indian colleague, as was clear from the context, meant not that ultimate degree of realization that a Christian expects to achieve only beyond this life in what theologians call the 'glorified body' (though yogis do claim that this is attainable and attained already in this world) but simply one who had achieved a notable degree of holiness or spiritual development with a true insight into spiritual things.

In restricting my search to one for an 'honest' or 'true' yogi I had also something else in mind. Many of the numerous books on yoga, yogis and eastern mysticism in general that have such a wide circulation in England, and still more in the United States, concentrate on the spectacular deeds of yogis on the material plane, their alleged miracles and supernatural, or at least preternatural, powers. There is undoubtedly in all of us an element that is fascinated by such phenomena: even the juggler's art, which we know to be illusion, can hold us spellbound; but to concentrate on such manifestations as the essential element in yoga would be the deepest degradation of true religion and of genuine mysticism. Your better type of yogi does indeed deprecate preoccupation with such phenomena as distracting people from the pursuit of the better, the spiritual, gifts which are the ultimate goal—'Be ye zealous for the better gifts.' Such powers may be acquired in the course of

progress to realization, but they are only a by-product of spiritual advance and, as being concerned with the material, visible world, not to be sought for their own sake. The final goal, 'isolation' in the yogic phraseology ('realization', 'independence'), completely transcends the material world; so to be concerned with such powers would be to stop short of one's goal —such is the teaching. As one swami explained it to me: In the manufacture of soap glycerine is also produced as a by-product; if you aimed at producing glycerine without soap you would get neither. Still these powers are represented in the classical writing on the subject as acquired regularly on the way to realization, even though one must not stop on the way. Alas! men are commonly more interested in such phenomena than in the attempt to go up higher, and it is undoubtedly this that gives yoga literature in the West its popularity. So I wanted to see if I could find examples of the exercise of such powers in the number one is led to expect through reading such books, or even to find any examples at all.

I am concerned here, of course, not just with 'magic' and jugglery of the Indian rope-trick type, or even with men who are buried alive and dug up after several days, or even months. This last is based upon control of breath and slowing of the heart and, theoretically at least, is within the reach of anyone who cares to practise enough, similar in some ways, it has been suggested, to the hibernation of animals: it is not, that is, sufficiently beyond normal natural powers to be called preternatural or supernatural. It is rather the *siddhis* or 'supernatural' powers recorded in the Hindu sacred books that I wished to investigate; whether they existed in great numbers of men, or whether they existed at all.

The classic source for the description of these powers, as acquired by the yogi in his progress to realization, is the *Yoga Sutra* of *Patanjali*.[1] Patanjali, writing in the second century B.C., is not, it is obvious, the founder of yoga, but the first known teacher to have reduced it to a system. The siddhis or extraordinary powers mentioned here as attainable by the yogi

[1] There have been many editions of this work. I am using the text and scholia edited with a translation by J. R. Ballantyne and Govind Sastri Deva (Susil Gupta (India) Ltd, Calcutta, 1955). There is a translation in *Wisdom of India*, Lin Yutang (Michael Joseph, London, and Jaico Books, Bombay).

include: all knowledge, of past, present and future, of the heavenly bodies, moon, stars etc.; power over the elements, ability to fly through the air at incredible speeds, walk on water, etc.; power over one's body, to be indestructible, appear and disappear at will, become small as an atom or as big as the world; the power of 'reach', for instance 'of touching the moon with the tip of the finger';[1] power over others, e.g. to enter into the body of another and animate it, to know the thoughts of another (at any distance); 'be surrounded by a blaze of light'; ability to see the *siddhas* or heavenly spirits. This is not a comprehensive list, but since it culminates in 'dominium' or 'all-power' by which the yogi attains to complete dominion over the visible creation, it is not necessary to mention them all: he has become Lord of the World.

Stated in terms of the scheme of the Pseudo-Denys one may imagine the yogi as slowly and painfully ascending the steps of the 'illuminative cascade' of being until finally he reaches the point at which the invisible, timeless and spaceless hierarchy has issued into the light of common day, and so is able to control it at its source. How within the yogic scheme, by successive stages of abstraction from the material world, he is conceived of as achieving this remarkable feat we shall see later. However such powers might be obtained, it was reasonable to suppose, considering the publicity given them, that one would come across *some* examples of their exercise.

I determined, then, to set out with an open mind, willing, and even anxious, to learn. My immediate object would be to look for a true yogi, one who, even if he had not reached complete realization, had at least achieved a considerable degree of sanctity. I would also look for one possessed of some, if not all, of the siddhis. I might, or might not, find what I was looking for combined in one and the same person. In the course of my enquiry I would take the opportunity of learning all I could about Hindu religion and philosophy; I had mapped out certain central themes that I especially wished to discuss. I expected to find Hinduism in its highest practical expression approaching closely to the highest development and expression of Christianity: this would be of value for a rapprochement between East and West, not to speak of my own personal

[1] Op. cit., p. 89.

edification. I have spoken only of Hinduism, but I intended also, as occasion offered, to extend my search to Buddhism.

YOGA

For a proper understanding of what is to follow, and even for an explanation of some terms I have already used, it is necessary for the reader to have some elementary ideas of yoga and Hinduism. Strictly speaking yoga is simply a method of attaining to that union with God, 'realization' in the Hindu terminology, which is the goal of all Hindu religion and indeed of religion in general. The etymology of the word is disputed, but the most probable explanation is that it derives from the same root as the Latin *iugum* and English *yoke*, and so radically is the science of 'uniting', 'yoking', the individual to God. The etymology of our word *religion* is likewise disputed, but if, as is probable, it comes from the same root as the Latin *ligare* and English *ligament* and so is connected with 'binding', 'tying' and 'joining', then it would seem to have much the same meaning as yoga, the art of 'joining', 'uniting', or 're-joining' man to God, or more generally the link or means of union between man and God.

A *yogi*, strictly speaking, is not just a practitioner of yoga but one who has attained to complete 'realization' or 'sanctity', has achieved that unity with God which is generally conceived by the Hindu, though we shall meet divergent opinions on this, as perfect *identification* with God. In the Christian parallel he would be considered to have achieved not just sanctity but the final complete sanctity (in the measure of which each is capable: there are varying degrees) of the blessed in heaven. In fact modern Hindu authors with a tendency to Christian terminology sometimes speak of a living yogi having achieved the 'beatific vision'. Western writers often use the word 'yogi' as though it were synonymous with the Christian 'contemplative'. This is not correct if 'contemplative' is taken in the common modern usage as meaning one who orders his whole life to the attainment of contemplation, or union with God, though in fact he may not reach it. A yogi, strictly speaking, is one who has already 'arrived' in the spiritual sense.[1] The better sadhu may

[1] There is considerable confusion in the use of this term 'contemplative' by modern spiritual writers. St. Thomas, from whom the modern usage

tell you modestly (thinking of himself) that it is never possible to say that one has attained to complete realization, but in fact he will at the same time tell you that others are fully 'realized' yogis.

The name is, however, in practice often used inaccurately to denote simply any student or practitioner of yoga, or even generally of a sadhu or swami who may not practise yoga (in the sense of this definite system) at all. Still more inaccurately the name is sometimes used to denote a wonder-worker, including the itinerant magician and juggler. Since no one would deny the name of yogi to anyone who has attained to full realization, whether through the practice of yoga or not—Christ is sometimes referred to in Hindu books as 'that Master-Yogin'—I shall use it to include this sense. When I wish to avoid ambiguity I use the phrase 'true yogi', meaning one who, even if he has not yet arrived, is well on the way.

As an afterthought, perhaps I ought to add that a true yogi (in my use of the phrase) is not even one who undertakes the practice of the 'yoga physical exercises and breath control' as advertised in my current copy of the *Sunday Times*! Yet even this has a certain right to claim to be yoga; it is an adaptation of one aspect of the true yoga system, designed to restore harmony between mind and body and then to place the body under the complete control of the mind as the first stage of the ascent to God. If it can do this, then it will earn our gratitude.

Yogi is not, therefore, synonymous with Hindu or even with words denoting a profession of the ascetic or monastic state in

stems, says that 'not those who contemplate but those who order their whole lives to contemplation' are called contemplatives (*Summa Theologica*, II, II, Qu. 81, 1 ad 5). This is usually interpreted as meaning that not all 'contemplatives' do in fact contemplate, but they are called contemplatives if they follow a form of life which has no object but contemplation, the immediate praise and worship of God. It is presumably in this sense that Thomas Merton in *Elected Silence* says that he found few 'contemplatives' in his own monastery. In fact St. Thomas is distinguishing between 'active' and 'contemplative', between those who undertake works of charity for the larger world and those who have no direct work for the world. In the mind of the Church, of which St. Thomas is a faithful interpreter, all baptized Christians are 'contemplatives' and do 'contemplate' in some degree, are admitted to contemplation of the 'mysteries' through which they are placed in union with and contemplation of the Divinity. The 'contemplative life' is thus simply the perfection of the ordinary Christian life in which everything is deliberately ordered to contemplation.

some form, such as sadhu, swami, sannyasi, bhikshu. Not all of these practise yoga in all its forms, and it is safe to say that comparatively few identify themselves with it in so far as it is a regular school of philosophy, having its own individual interpretation of disputed aspects of the Hindu sacred books. In the sense, however, that yoga is a practical systematization of the means of attaining to union or identity with God, it is obvious that everyone within the Hindu system who is striving towards realization is practising some degree of yoga, is on the way to becoming a yogi. In the stricter sense this is simply the explanation of one school, the *yoga school*, of how it happens.

This western practice of making yoga vaguely equivalent to Hinduism has in fact, however, some further justification in Hinduism itself. The sacred books of the Hindus, in particular the *Vedas*, which are regarded as divine and infallible though the manner of their divinity and infallibility is explained in different ways by different schools, are known at first hand to very few. Indeed the ordinary man, even the ordinary educated man, would find it impossible to extract from them any consistent, systematic knowledge of the divine or of his own relationship to the divine. They contain brilliant, isolated intuitions of the truth, but are full of ambiguities, inconsistencies and contradictions that have given rise to innumerable Hindu philosophical schools and religious sects differing one from another on the most fundamental matters. It is, however, sufficient to hold the inerrancy and divinity of the Vedas (however one may understand this) in order to be a Hindu; it is possible, for instance, to be an atheist and a Hindu provided one holds by the Vedas;[1] belief in the Vedas is the one criterion. In practice the handbook and 'bible' of the ordinary Hindu is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, regarded by them as containing the essence of their religion, though even this, it must be confessed, with many obscurities and inconsistencies. It is not in the canon of sacred, 'revealed', Hindu books, only part of the traditional

[1] Cf. *An Outline of Hinduism*, Fr. Zacharias, O.C.D., Alwaye, 1956, p. 23. The Vedas were composed by the earliest *rishis* or teachers, according to our present knowledge, some time before 1000 B.C. They are said to have been *revealed* to the rishis; but Hindu scholars do not agree concerning the manner of 'revelation'. The modern tendency is to present them as the 'intuitions' of self-evident truths, seen clearly by the rishis because of the measure of their abstraction from passions and the distractions of external phenomena.

(*smriti*) literature, but it is nevertheless the religious and devotional book most widespread among Indians and many of them can recite long passages by heart. It is also probably the Indian sacred book best known to the average western student. Its date of composition is uncertain and much disputed; it was most probably written within the first three centuries of the Christian era, but it is not possible to summarize the arguments for this date here. The point is the great emphasis laid on yoga, meaning not just yoga, the movement to union with God, but yoga the system of this philosophical school. The impression is given that the yoga system that found its classic expression in the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali about 150 B.C. had degenerated, and that one of the main purposes of the *Gita* was to re-establish it and bring it back to favour. In consequence there has been bred a certain tendency, even among Hindus, to regard the yoga that is strictly only the system of one of several main philosophical schools as providing pre-eminently the basis for the practice of their religion.

But it is not only, or even principally, through the *Bhagavad-Gita* that yoga has become in the West to be more or less identified with Hinduism; it is in this form that Hinduism has principally been presented to the West by modern Hindu missionary movements. This has been done both through writing and through the establishment of yoga centres with correspondence courses in the West, especially in the United States, always so avid of novel spiritual experience. The practical advantages of the yoga school as an interpretation of Hinduism are obvious. It offers a comprehensive scheme for attaining to the realization which is the common goal of all the Hindu schools, taking from them all whatever it finds useful; and some of its degrees are in some measure quickly attainable by anyone with a minimum of goodwill.

An exposition of the theory and practice of yoga would be outside the scope of this present book. Based on a detailed and intricate theory of physiology and psychology it demands an extremely strict bodily, mental and moral discipline aimed at withdrawing man from the visible material world of the senses and uniting him to the Supreme Being. Certain aspects of this development are sometimes spoken of as so many different methods, or schools, or 'yogas', but in fact are all part of one

comprehensive system and all in greater or lesser degree essential to it, even though the practitioner may confine himself to one or more aspects. Modern presentations of yoga all have their variations and the latest tendency is to speak of *yoga synthesis*, emphasizing the desirability of using *all* and any means that may help towards realization. I therefore use the name yogi in its widest sense of a Hindu who has attained to realization by any system, whether through yoga or some part of it or not, and in my quest for one with the siddhis or preternatural powers I was again not primarily interested in whether or not he was a strict adherent of the yoga school.

Even from what has been said it will be evident that the yoga philosophy is based on a deep awareness of what Christians call the 'Fall', by which man has become immersed in matter and subject to his material, sensible environment instead of being able to dominate it by the power of the spirit; that his higher spiritual powers have become atrophied by disuse. It should be noted that the marvellous powers already mentioned are not considered to be supernatural (for this reason I have tended to use the word 'preternatural' in speaking of them); they are held to be within the reach of all by the exercise of purely natural powers. They are 'preternatural' or 'abnormal' only in the sense that not many in fact do exercise them.

A clear understanding of what is meant by 'supernatural' is essential for any appreciation of yoga and Hinduism, especially for one whose mind is already formed in a Christian mould. The word is often used loosely for any unusual happening, and in yogic literature the siddhis, for instance, are often spoken of as 'supernatural' powers, although it is a cardinal point of yoga that there is no supernatural. Swami Vivekananda, one of the most outstanding modern exponents of yoga,[1] writes: 'There is no supernatural, says the yogi. . . . The idea of supernatural beings . . . brings dependence; it brings fear; it brings superstition. It degenerates into a horrible belief in the natural weakness of man.'

In the strict sense, the only proper sense, 'supernatural' denotes something—a power, an action, a mode of existence—that completely transcends the limits of the natural. It may be only the *manner* of doing something that is supernatural, some-

[1] *Outline of Hinduism*, p. 134.

thing still in the material world that could be done by other, by natural, means. So *Father Malachy's Miracle*, in Bruce Marshall's story, consisted in transporting a disreputable dance-hall from Edinburgh to the Bass Rock. Presumably it could have been done by natural means, by demolishing the building and reassembling it stone by stone in its new position. Father Malachy's method was to cause it to rise in the air, revolve slowly as though seeking its direction, then sail away in the direction of the Firth of Forth and the Bass Rock until its lights were lost in the distance.

The general idea is, I think, familiar to most people; that such things are done—when they are done—through an agency more than human, since they exceed all known natural powers. 'Known', however, seems to be the important word in the last phrase. We do not in fact know the limits of human power or of what can be done by purely natural means. We see things done now that seemed quite impossible fifty years ago. One might say in the case of Father Malachy that he himself at least would be conscious that he was not performing this feat by his own power; he knew that he had not, after long research, evolved such a novel method of removing undesirable residences, so it must be attributable to an agency outside himself. But this is not self-evident. It is just conceivable that he was using a power he did not know he possessed, using it unconsciously, and that we could all do it if we tried. It is no argument to say that such a thing has never been done before; many things are done now that have never been done before. The point is that yogis would claim that such things can be done, and are done, by natural powers, by anyone who likes to take the trouble. There are powers in all of us, of which we are unconscious, or barely conscious, that simply need releasing or realizing: such is the thesis. At one spot in the Himalayas that I visited, Ranikhet, it is claimed that a palace was produced, 'materialized', in this way, surely a more difficult task even than removal by air; a palace 'of dazzling gold studded with jewels' complete with gardens, 'real even as the earth is real'.[1] It may

[1] Cf. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramhansa Yogananda (Rider and Co., 1953), pp. 260 ff. The author is the founder of the 'Self-Realization Fellowship' of U.S.A., including the 'Self-Realization Church of All Religions', San Diego.

be so. My rough and ready method was to seek for one or two examples of the exercise of such powers; to discover *if* it was done before enquiring *how* it was done.

The crucial question—and it is at the very root of Hinduism—is whether there is any room for distinction between 'natural' and 'supernatural' (in the strict sense) in a system in which all things *are* God. If it is the nature of all things to be God, there is obviously no room for the supernatural; on the other hand what is 'natural' on this hypothesis is what the Christian calls supernatural. The actual difference (as distinct from difference in mode of expression) between the Hindu and Christian positions at this level is not so great as may appear at first sight.

What the Christian calls 'natural' is not a sphere or state independent of God and withdrawn from his control; God has not only brought it into being, he remains in it as the source of its being and activity, so that even man's freedom of action in each particular decision is received from God.[1] It was not just a case of producing a world and then leaving it to carry on completely emancipated and self-sufficient; if God were to withdraw his presence, 'forget' it, for a moment, it would cease to exist. Nor has man and his world ever in fact existed in a purely 'natural' state. In sorting out one's ideas it is useful to distinguish natural from supernatural and say that God *could* have made a purely natural man, with natural powers and the natural material world and nothing beyond it, but that he chose in fact to add something that raised man above the natural, to a 'supernatural' sphere or plane, 'super' or above an order that was possible but never did in fact exist. It is usual to stress the gratuitousness of this gift or 'grace', the fact that it was in no way 'owing' to man's nature but was on a completely different plane, so that no possible development of man's

[1] In the scholastic phrase God is present in all things *per essentiam, praesentiam et potentiam* ('by essence, presence and power'): he is present in all things as their very being and the power by which they exist and move. One could hardly say more. This is what the Hindu is saying when he tells us that 'all things are God'. But for the Christian—as we shall see it is impossible to obtain any clear teaching from the Hindu on the point—God is also at the same time utterly beyond created things, transcendent; and created things can never *contain* him. It is unfortunate, however, that in the West the degree in which we thus literally 'live and move and have our being' in God is not more emphasized.

'natural' powers could ever reach it. That, of course, is so; but we must not forget that the whole of man's nature is gratuitous, a free gift, that God *need not* have made man at all. Certain powers and qualities can be said to be 'natural' or 'owing' to man only in the sense that God chose to make man like that and chooses to keep him in that particular form.

Men are not, of course, born into a purely 'natural' state, but into a state that has fallen from the 'supernatural'. There is more than a world of difference, since the latter implies at least an emptiness, a thirst, a capacity for the supernatural that is calling out to be filled; and all their lives, at every moment, men are being offered the means of filling it. The Creator has in fact so arranged it, granted that he might have arranged it otherwise, that we receive a being and existence which is one whole, looking outwards into this visible world and simultaneously looking inwards into God. If we call it supernatural we mean only that God *might* have given us part of it—better, one aspect of it—without the other. Nor are these two spheres, planes, aspects, dimensions—however we describe them—entirely without any resemblance one to the other; although the upper proceeds on an entirely different plane, yet the lower is a valid reflection of this in its own way, at its own level, in terms of what we call the visible, material world.[1]

The Christian will best understand this union and interpenetration of natural and supernatural in the existing order by reference to Christ, the Word Incarnate, as the source and origin of our being on both levels. In his person both are inseparably united and it is by the life of Christ on all levels that we live.

'Supernatural' therefore, it is obvious, is a word that may mislead. When we speak of 'miracles', 'miraculous powers', that is of *extraordinary* power from God, or even of a temporary suspension of the regular 'laws of nature' by their Creator, we must remember that our ordinary actions too are from God, moved by him, even, the Thomists say, 'pre-moved'—and that is, in a way, almost more extraordinary than extraordinary assistance and intervention.

Perhaps a better distinction for the Christian, and certainly a more fundamental one, is that between Creator and creature.

[1] The resemblance of analogy: as A is to B so is C to D. Cf. also p. 51.

The Creator, while immanent, present and indwelling, in each and every part of his creation, yet remains at one and the same time completely distinct from it, infinitely transcendent; however far and in whatever direction the creature may develop he can never reach a point at which he becomes one with God in the sense of becoming equal to him, comprehending and encompassing him: God remains ever infinitely beyond. It is by such a criterion that the Christian will wish to assess the claims of the yogi to reach his consummation by purely 'natural' means. If we accept his own premise that it is God in him who does everything, it would seem to matter little whether we say 'natural' or 'supernatural'. What, however, the yogi really seems to be saying—and this emerges very clearly in the declaration of Swami Vivekananda quoted above—is that there is nothing 'super' or above man; he is denying the distinction between Creator and creature, the transcendence of God. Man is God, and once man has developed his powers, realized his full stature, there is nothing beyond him, nothing outside or above him. I find it a depressing thought. It is possible to find in the Hindu scriptures passages that can be interpreted as implying the transcendence of God, but the predominant notion certainly seems to be that expressed in the passage quoted. It is, however, typical of Hinduism, as we shall see in the following section, that in such a fundamental question we can have no certainty, no authoritative interpretation. At best we take a guru, hoping that he knows more than we do, and follow him implicitly.

The Christian, believing that his own religion is the fulfilment of all that other religions sought and hoped for, revealed by God in person, catholic or universal, with a teaching authority guaranteed by God himself, is in a position to discern what it is that yoga and Hinduism are trying to say and to do, and to interpret their obscurities and contradictions. For the convenience of any whose divinity may have become a little rusty since their schooldays I will attempt to summarize very briefly the Christian doctrine in so far as it bears on this point of yogic powers.

In the 'state of innocence' before the Fall man's body and his material environment were, as we have already mentioned, completely subject to his spirit. The scheme of the Pseudo-

Denys helps us to visualize very crudely how this may happen. So his body, for instance, was immune from sickness, suffering and death. His knowledge did not depend on his bodily senses and the things of the material world; knowledge obtained through the senses was only a reflection of what he already knew in a higher way. Some of his powers and qualities were 'preternatural' in the sense that they were still on the natural plane, but exceeded what is 'natural' to us, or normal, in our present condition since the Fall. Others were supernatural in the strict sense, on a plane completely transcending the natural, to which man was raised in being made a 'sharer in the divine nature', through what the early Greek theologians commonly called 'deification': God remains transcendent and distinct while man yet 'becomes God'.

Man's 'restoration' or 'redemption' is effected by his incorporation in the Mystical Body of Christ through initiation into the 'mysteries' or sacraments by means of which the life of Christ, the God-Man, is mystically re-enacted in the initiate. (In the scheme of the Pseudo-Denys this is at the point where the invisible hierarchy joins the visible one, the point at which the visible world takes its origin.) All that man had lost by the Fall is now restored through this initiation; restored *radically*, that is, but in a restoration that covers the whole life of the individual, reaching its completion when the death of Christ which has been mystically accomplished in him through the sacraments has its final fulfilment in his own historical death.

We are able to have a much clearer idea of the powers of man in his final 'restored', glorified' state, after reunion of soul and body, than we have of the powers of man in his former state of innocence, because the powers of his final state are those of the risen Christ, and of some of these we have written, historical evidence. His bodily powers are then perfectly subject to his spirit and follow it. They are traditionally classified under the main headings of: *Impassibility*—immunity from death, pain or injury of any kind; *subtilty*—the power to penetrate other material bodies without harm to either (cf. Christ passing through a closed door); *agility*—power to pass from place to place at will as quickly as thought and to move other bodies in the same way; *clarity*—beauty or brightness, a reflection in the body of the beauty of the soul (cf. the 'transfiguration'

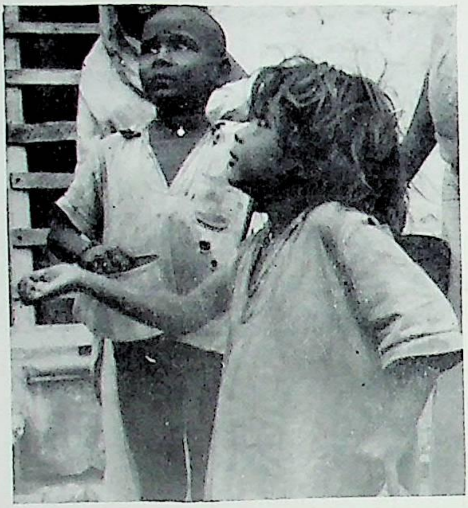
of Christ on Mount Tabor, a foreshadowing of the beauty of his resurrection body, and the yogi 'in a blaze of light').

That is after death. In this life, while we are still 'on the way', there may be, apart from strictly miraculous happenings, in answer to prayer or otherwise as a direct sign from God in testimony of some truth, also partial, temporary, intermittent restorations of one or other of these preternatural powers, usually in circumstances involving some degree of abstraction from the sensible world. It is undoubtedly within this framework that genuine (as distinct from the mass of false) occult phenomena, E.S.P. and other psychic experience are to be explained. I do not propose to expound a theory of such matters, but one question that sometimes troubles people should be noted: examination of such phenomena shows that they seem to have no necessary connection with the practice of religion or with moral goodness. This is understandable enough if we realize that these are merely physical powers, concerned with the material world, offered to all men as an integral part of their redemption in Christ, yet in this present life dependent, partly at least, on the accidental physical constitution of the individual. In the terms of the Pseudo-Denys the Light offers itself to all without discrimination; these particular phenomena belong to the bottom of the scale of values, the beginning of the process of redemption or restoration, which may, like everything else in nature, lead on to something higher, become a 'means of grace', the vehicle of the supernatural.[1] It would, however, be a mistake to regard them as favours or marks of special divine predilection. They may be this, and sometimes are when they appear as miraculous happenings in the lives of

[1] In this sense everything in the life of a man is a 'grace', offering a transient participation in the being and activity of God; in the scholastic terminology an 'actual grace', intended to lead on to the gift of an habitual, permanent participation, 'habitual grace', which is finally permanent, inamissible, only at the conclusion of life in this world. I think by 'realization' the yogi means the acquisition of 'habitual grace'—in simple language, union, 'oneness', with God. In the Christian scheme even when the union is realized, when man is in 'a state of grace', he still has to come to spiritual maturity by a continual increase of 'grace' throughout his life in this world until the moment of death. I suspect that the yogi, when he distinguishes 'realization' and 'perfect realization', has something of this in mind. We shall see this later.



3. 'Desirable Residence?' Medical Mission nuns from the Poona Dispensary (p. 20), on tour in the surrounding villages, with a typical low caste family.



4. 'Untouchable' children.



5. Hill children from the Garhwal-Almora district.



6. High caste Indian (Medical Mission nun) with low caste patient, until recently an impossible combination. The saree is drawn up to form a covering for the head.



7. Trivandrum: A young man of brahmin (the highest) caste, from which Hindu priests are drawn. The sacred brahmin thread (p. 149) can be seen. The *dhoti*, of thin cotton, is in Kerala allowed to hang to the ankles instead of being drawn up between the legs. The other towel-like garment is usually carried slung folded over one shoulder, but may be used as shawl, rain-coat or head covering. The whole ensemble is very practical, comfortable and economical and, with the better class, always spotlessly clean. There is, of course, no necessary connection between caste and material wealth.

those whose sanctity is already sufficiently evident; but in other cases they are more likely to be used for selfish ends and may serve to anchor man more firmly in the material world which it is his whole business to transcend. This, as we have seen, is the attitude of the better yogi to such phenomena. They may, indeed, be a trial and a burden; second sight, for instance, is commonly regarded by its possessor as an affliction rather than a favour, something to be feared—'man cannot bear too much reality'.

The yoga system aims at a progressive withdrawal from the material world, apparently with the idea that the ultimate vital principle in man that normally manifests itself through the bodily senses could, if abstracted methodically from operation through the senses, whereby it is limited to the immediate object of these, operate in a manner analogous to sight, hearing, smell, etc., but with unlimited power, unrestricted by the material extension of space-time. It is probably by a continuation of this idea that modern commentators sometimes tend to explain these phenomena in terms of the *astral body* of modern theosophy. Expressed in the broadest and crudest terms it seems to be regarded as a withdrawal from the more superficial to the deeper planes or layers of reality spoken of in early yogic literature as 'sheaths' surrounding the inner real self which is identical with God. The most external of these is that of *maya*, illusion. Since they are all thus, like so many skins of an onion, to be peeled off one after the other in order to penetrate to the hidden kernel, each, though on a different plane, is in the same shape or form with at least the resemblance of analogy. It may be possible to visualize the process by thinking of the *Hierarchies* of the Pseudo-Denys, each member containing everything in the line below it and those below, each in its proportion, reflecting on its lower plane all that is above. Or, for the declining number of those who are familiar with it, the ascending hierarchy of being in the 'Cave' of the seventh book of Plato's *Republic*.

Considering more specifically man's relation to the world of phenomena, this world is considered as a further projection or extension of man, and again more specifically of his body. In the language of the *mantras* and of *tantric yoga*[1] the 'vibrations' of the one Word, OM, producing first the form of man, proceed through him to the production of the world external to him. It

[1] Cf. p. 251.

is therefore possible—such is the thought—to identify a particular member, organ, nerve of the body with specific material phenomena and by the exercise of 'restraint' or 'control' (*sanyama*) regarding this particular part of the anatomy (apparently withdrawing and concentrating the vital energy that would normally be expended—dissipated in fact—through the senses and feelings, to its source; along the same lines, so to speak, but to the point at which it emerges into the phenomenal world) be able to control at will that aspect of material phenomena. Patanjali enumerates in detail the various 'restraints' to be practised for the acquiring of the different siddhis. In the same line of thought is the notion that will be met later, that by closing your eyes to a thing it is no longer there and that by willing a thing hard enough you can produce it. If this should appear to the westerner a retreat into sheer phantasy and imagination, it is not so for the yogi; rather it is the first stage on the way to a deeper reality. Shakespeare's Bolingbroke cried out:

> O who can hold a fire in his hand
> By thinking on the frosty Caucasus,
> Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
> By bare imagination of a feast,
> Or wallow naked in December snow
> By thinking on phantastic summer's heat?

The yogi would reply that anyone can who likes to put his mind to it.

For the Christian too his movement is, or should be, from the surface to the interior, the visible to the invisible. St Thomas in the *Summa* lays it down as a general principle that we are distracted from contemplation of spiritual realities by undue attention to externals; the higher realities are there but we fail to notice them. But there is a difference. The object of the Hindu, and more particularly of the yogi, is to get away from this material world as expeditiously as possible, and that for ever. The Christian believes that in proportion as he walks away from this world he is in fact approaching it as a permanent possession; his movement is towards Christ, to union with him in whom this world and the next, all things visible and invisible, are inseparably united. I am sure that this is what the yogi too is really trying to say, but it is not in fact what he does say and

later I shall recount some of the conflicting ideas I found on this point.

In any study of the Hindu schools the Christian must be struck repeatedly by the subtlety and profundity of so much in its thought and by the manner in which, over and over again, some aspect of it, in spite of, or perhaps even because of, distortion or exaggeration, throws into high relief some aspect of his own faith which had formerly not received sufficient notice. At the same time, as he reads on, it will dawn on him ever more clearly that it is only his own unhesitating sense of direction that enables him to blaze a trail through this four-thousand-year jungle of speculation, that Hinduism is rather in the nature of an enormous, overwhelming jig-saw puzzle, glimpsed in some dim cosmic nightmare, and that his own religion alone can provide the picture into which all the pieces will fit.

HINDUISM

For the purposes of this book it is not necessary for the reader to have a definition of Hinduism, and an adequate descriptive sketch of it would far exceed the scope of the present theme. I am tempted to borrow the utterance of the Divinity Professor of New College, Edinburgh, and say: 'Gentlemen, I have been looking it up; (since 1892) you can believe any damned thing you like',[1] and leave it at that, just changing 'since 1892' to 'for the past four thousand years'. It may, however, be useful for the reader to have noted certain outstanding characteristics of Hinduism; he will thus see more easily the significance of the questions I shall ask later.

Hinduism is, in fact, commonly considered to be indefinable, not patient of definition; indeed it is sometimes objected that the very name 'Hindu' is something imposed by non-Hindus in order to distinguish themselves from him. It is in fact less a religion than an attitude of mind, a mentality. Radhakrishnan, the present Vice-President of India and one of the foremost modern Hindu scholars, describes it as 'a way of life', giving 'absolute liberty in the world of thought'.[2] Perhaps its very 'indefinability' is the one single note that can be traced throughout

[1] Cf. *One True Kirk*, Ronald Wall (Burns and Oates, 1960).

[2] *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 34. (Quoted in *Outline of Hinduism*, p. 356.)

every aspect of Hinduism, enabling it to claim that every religious belief is contained within it—this and the acceptance of the Vedas as self-evident and infallible (though their meaning may be explained in any number of contradictory ways). The Vedas may be considered to have been revealed by God, in the usual sense of the term, or, if you choose not to believe in God, they may be held to have been 'revealed' only in the sense of being the original compositions of the bishis, the earliest teachers, their intuition of the ultimate truth.

Such 'indefinability' gives Hinduism an obvious advantage—some would perhaps say an unfair advantage—over other religions; you can add to it or subtract from it anything you like and it remains untouched: the number you first thought of. An article before me at the moment, taken from a learned eastern philosophical review and written by an Indian Catholic priest, a man of exceptional ability and wide reading, almost more Hindu than the Hindus, who shall for the purposes of this notice be anonymous, claims that: 'Hinduism stands for truth and truth alone. If something proves to be truth and is not yet incorporated into Hinduism (seen as a way of life), Hinduism will not hesitate for one moment to accept it.' I give this as typical of many such statements. It all depends on what you mean by 'truth'. Can opposites be both true at one and the same time and in every respect? Hinduism seems to say 'yes'. There is hardly a single proposition made by Hinduism that is not contradicted by some other; are they all true? Again the answer seems to be 'yes'. Expressed in a slightly different way: Can Hinduism accept within its system (I am not sure that 'incorporate' is the word in such an incorporeal context) mutually contradictory ideas, or systems and organizations, bodies that explicitly declare that they are exclusive? Again the answer seems to be: 'Yes; let them all come.' Swami Vivekananda, already quoted, declares roundly: 'Dogma has no place in religion,' and 'There is no sin; it is blasphemous to say that we are sinners.'

As an illustration of the practical difficulties that may arise from this mentality I might mention the case of a young educated Hindu who had asked for instruction in the Catholic religion. The teacher assigned to him was a high-caste Indian Catholic priest who had made a special study of Hinduism and

so was particularly well fitted to understand the mentality of the young man. But it was difficult to make a start; to find a single proposition that could be accepted as true in all circumstances. He could not be persuaded, for instance, that black was not white; it could at one and the same time be black for you and white for me; such was the argument. It was not just a matter of degrees of blackness or whiteness, one shading off into the other, as in the situation where a schoolboy's towel, described by him as white, may be stigmatized by his mother as black and, by a reasonable compromise, might fairly be called grey; nor was it a case of the 'whiter whites' that are produced—so it is alleged—by somebody's detergent; no, it is a question of the very essence of 'blackness' and 'whiteness': they are in reality one and the same; it is only to different people that they *seem* to be different—such, roughly, is the argument. It is possible for the same mentality to accept as true a certain proposition and at one and the same time—apparently in all good faith and with no sense of inconsistency—to hold also the opposite. The problem in such a case is to know at any given moment which the man is acting on.[1]

Perhaps, however, the note most immediately obvious to the outside observer, before he begins to speculate and seek for definitions of Hinduism, is simply a special distinctive mentality, an attitude arising from a conviction of the all-pervading presence of One Supreme Being outside of whom there is nothing, in whom 'we live and move and have our being'.

[1] In Christian theology God does transcend all that we can say or deny of him, even the opposition between Yes and No, so that so far as terms and concepts taken from the world of phenomena are concerned he can be approached only through what is variously described as a *docta ignorantia*, 'cloud of unknowing', or 'luminous darkness' and similar paradoxical phrases. To say, however, that the opposition between, for instance, black and white is transcended in God, their Cause, is a very different matter from denying any difference between them in the world of phenomena—unless we take at its face value the assertion that *all* distinction is illusion, *maya*; but, as we shall discover, this world of *maya* is not just nothing, *maya* is rather the way of describing the *relationship* between it and the ultimate reality. It is obvious in any case that the Hindu must in fact accept such distinctions and definitions as a working hypothesis in the conduct of human affairs, but his whole business in life is to withdraw from them to a point at which all opposition is transcended in the One—God. I think he is in fact trying to say no more than the Christian mystic.

(The Hindu prefers a term like Supreme Being, The One, Brahma, Universal Consciousness, and avoids referring to God as a 'person', since this term carries for him the idea of limitation, and so in this view is inapplicable to the Godhead.) Whether this conviction or consciousness comes from the Vedas or the Vedas are an expression or formulation of it is not of consequence for the Hindu. To the Christian there can be no doubt that, whatever its vehicle, it is a partial revelation of himself by God.

Hinduism can perhaps most easily be appreciated as the result of speculation on this deepest of all convictions, in particular as a search for an explanation of the relationship between the one unseen, transcendent Being and the visible world; a sense that man and his world are somehow one with God yet at the same time distinct; an explanation of how this could be, and also an attempt to bridge the gulf which it was felt ought not to be there: 're-union', 're-ligion', yoga in its widest sense. It is from this that stems its facility for reconciling opposites, or, as itself would prefer to say, seeming opposites, since it tries to see them as merely so many ways in which the One has manifested itself, so forming the material world. As for this world itself: considered apart from God, the One, it is maya, illusion, like something produced by a juggler out of a hat. Not that it is just nothing—indeed the *vivarttavada* theory of Samkaracharya comes very close to the Christian doctrine of 'creation from nothing'—but it is not what it seems to be; its apparently conflicting aspects are so many different ways of viewing God who yet remains unchanged and undiminished. This Hindu world and its religion has much in common with Plato's world of 'becoming' rather than of full 'being'; or it may remind the Christian who is familiar with it of the 'recapitulation' teaching of some of the early Christian Fathers: all the scattered elements of creation being gathered up, 'recapitulated', into Christ who, as the term of the process, presents it to the Father, and finally God is All in All.

Whatever is found useful as contributing to this cosmic yoga, as helping to 'realize' it as a whole or in the individual—for the Hindu there is no distinction—is good and acceptable: such is the argument. It is when this argument is applied to religions that it is likely to appear shocking to Christians of all denomi-

nations. Hinduism is prepared to accept all the 'heresies' and '-isms' ever thought up by the *odium theologicum*. The article already referred to[1] as declaring that 'Hinduism stands for truth' goes on to say that it 'stands for idolatry'. 'How can a tribesman realize God or reach salvation except by a certain animistic attitude and idol worship?' 'Highly developed souls' will penetrate beyond externals and realize that 'the Absolute is beyond all names and forms. So Hinduism also stands for—a purely transcendent Godhead devoid of attributes.'

However shocking this may sound to us it is our business to understand the Hindu point of view; there is obviously a certain stark realism about it; the acceptance of a situation as it actually is, not as it ought to be (so we think), as it might have been, or as we would like it to be. Some men *do* worship idols, *are* animists, or practise one of the other hundreds of religions in the world. This is a fact whether we like it or not, and must be accepted as such. And all these religions contain a certain element of truth, some positive good, no matter how attenuated; and each may be, for the one who professes it, the starting-point of an ascent to something higher—but 'one does not become a yogi in one incarnation'. The state in which each one finds himself is *his* state, and his religion is *his* religion. How comes it that one is higher, spiritually, socially, than another? It must be the inevitable consequence of some act, retribution; it is his *karma*. But this supposes that he must have lived before this present life, and if he is ever to achieve yoga or union, with *moksha* (final liberation) from material things, this can only be after a whole series of rebirths leading to his full development. (The Christian will find it interesting to compare this classic belief in reincarnation and transmigration with his own doctrine of original sin, purgatory, and redemption through incorporation into Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body and source of its life.[2]) Such appears to be the line of thought. Yoga, union with the One Supreme Being, is the end of all men, and

[1] P. 54.

[2] The whole process of purgation and redemption for a Christian, after incorporation through baptism into Christ, the source of all being, recapitulating the history of the whole human race, is in a sense a whole series of 'reincarnations' (his 'new birth' in Christ extended over each moment of time), accomplished either in the world of phenomena or, more usually,

the starting-point of each one is nobody's business but his own, his *karma*.

It is in the same spirit that the Hindu is able to worship his innumerable 'gods': I believe there does not exist any exhaustive inventory of them. They are 'manifestations' or 'incarnations' of God, differing only in degree from the 'incarnations' of God that all men are, and to think of them as 'saints' rather than as gods would convey a more correct idea to the western mind. Psychologically they no doubt owe their origin largely to the instinctive desire of all men for a 'personal' god in their own image and likeness; it is hard to worship a universal consciousness. But again it is not necessary that these 'gods' should ever have existed or that the stories told of them should have any basis in historic fact; to one of them has been attributed incidents almost identical with those of the birth and life of Christ. One of the most popular is Krishna, partly, at least, through the influence of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. His morals (as related in the *Puranas*, not in the *Gita*) are deplorable; but that again is no bar to entry into the Hindu Pantheon.

'All religions are equal.' This is a regular slogan of modern Hinduism; but, as with so much in Hinduism, it does not mean quite what it seems to mean. It is, for instance, unthinkable to the Hindu that a man should turn from Hinduism to another religion for religious motives alone: Hinduism is his *karma* just as his caste is. When, all the same, this does happen, such a man is cut off completely from all his former social contacts. Missionary activity by Christians is deeply resented. Hinduism, on the other hand, readily receives converts to itself and has a growing number of missionary centres in the West with an active literary propaganda. In India Christians are accepted within the Indian scheme of things—and, the Hindu would like to think, within Hinduism itself—almost as a separate new caste; this especially by the ordinary people with their characteristic kindly tolerance. It is said that there is deep, though generally concealed, hostility towards Christianity on the part of the brahmins, the highest caste, the intellectual and religious leaders of India. I must in justice say that I had no personal

completed in the mysterious state and place of 'purgatory', in the course of which man achieves his full stature or 'realization', measures up to his 'idea' and the source of his being in God. Cf. note to p. 296.

experience of this; but there does undoubtedly exist a strong undercurrent of hostility towards Christianity, due partly perhaps to the fact that it is regarded as a western importation (though in truth it was the West that imported Christianity from the East), and perhaps partly to the indiscreet and discourteous proselytizing of some of the minor Christian sects.

What has been said in the last few pages is an over-simplification of an extremely complex situation, as all generalizations must be. The following pages will offer many qualifications and serve to present the scene in a longer perspective.

II
The Sacred River—Ganges

THE sacred River, the Ganges (called also the Ganga), winds its way like a great serpent across the vast plain of Northern India. It has its tail in the high Himalayas, in the little triangle formed where India marches with Tibet and Nepal. At Calcutta its many heads (for it is also something of a monster) pour its water into the Bay of Bengal, whence it is carried, diluted no doubt but none the less recognizable, to every quarter of the globe. This river, pre-eminently *the* Sacred River of the Hindus, since it is believed that all other sacred rivers derive their sanctity from it through subterranean channels, may well be taken as the symbol of Hinduism. It has in Hindu thought what in Christianity would be called a sacramental character; it is the material vehicle of a spirit which assumes this form in the solitude of the Himalayas. As the Indian *White Paper* on the border dispute expresses it in its historical preamble: 'Shiva was the Mountain-God, Parvati the daughter of the Himalayas, Ganga her elder sister, and Meru, Vishnu's mountain, was the pivot of the universe.'

It brings with it a material life and growth that is the external expression of the unseen life of the spirit. Its waters give life and fertility on the material plane to this vast area; west of the point at which it swings round for its journey east is the great Indian Desert, removed from its influence. Of infinitely greater importance for the Hindu is the spiritual life and fertility it brings, so that a pilgrimage to its waters is the cherished hope of every pious Hindu. Indeed should he be fortunate enough to die at Banaras, the city rendered most sacred of all by the flow of its

waters, he is assured of salvation; for him there will be no more rebirth; he will pass straight to the ultimate goal of man, moksha, nirvana. Many rajas and other wealthy men have palaces there in the hope that when their time comes it will overtake them when they are in residence. Unfair? An unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity? Not in the Hindu view. They have attained to their present affluence through their meritorious lives in a former incarnation, just as those with no hope of ever reaching the sacred river owe it to their misdeeds in a former existence—karma.

The Sacred City of Banaras is a fact; the coils of the great river, the source of its sanctity, are tangible and visible to all: but the point at which it begins and ends is as elusive and indefinable as the Hinduism it symbolizes and personifies. Gangotri is said to be its source, and during the season thousands of pilgrims toil up to it, yet it is generally admitted that the exact location of the source is unknown; somewhere in the area is all one can say with certitude. It is fitting that the birth of a goddess should be hidden from the sight of ordinary mortals. The cartographers, whose duty it surely is to know such things, seem also not to know where it goes to, where it ends; at least if one may judge from the maps I have been able to consult in India. It is there; no one knows whence it comes; then suddenly it is not there.

The official map of the Indian Central Railway traces its source in an admirably clear blue line right up to some thirty miles due north of Nanda Devi, where it is conveniently lost in the thick purple boundary line of the Tibetan border. On its path across the plain the name no longer appears at all beyond Banaras, though a number of tributaries have their names carefully printed. It never reaches the sea at all—at least on the evidence of this map; the Hooghly, the Matla and the Haringhata are the only names given to the hydra-headed monster that appears at the Calcutta Delta.

I was not able to find any satisfactory reason why Banaras should be the most sacred city of India; its sanctity is obviously connected in some way with the Ganges. It was suggested that the reason was lost in antiquity but that most probably, like so many lesser places, it originated in the settlement of some particularly holy man. However, if that were the case, it is surely

unusual that there is no record of any one outstanding personage. The only positive information I could get was from Dr. Panikkar of Banaras Hindu University, a devoted student of Hinduism and so able to speak with some authority. He told me it was because at this point the Ganges turns north towards the Himalayas, returning to its source; it has come into the material world of men and is now inviting them to accompany it back whence it came: this, I take it, is roughly the implication. Whether its loss of identity on the railway map after this point reflects a common acceptance of this view I am unable to say; the point did not occur to me at the time. So there it is, the Sacred River. There is no doubt of its existence; but on the visual evidence of this map no one is able to define it, no one able to say with certainty where it begins or where it ends.

The otherwise admirable 1:4,000,000 Bartholomew's map of India, which I had brought with me from England, conveys the same impression by slightly different methods. From Hardwar on (just after you leave the point at which it reaches the plain at Rishikesh) it appears as a firm, wide blue line. North of Hardwar it disappears for all practical purposes. For a time a very thin, almost indecipherable black line, at times obscured by the thin red line of a road—then it is no more; three other names appear just at the point where one might expect to be able to trace it to its source. I ask: Is this the way to treat a sacred river? Well, perhaps after all it is. There seems, however, to be some doubt even of its identity: from Hardwar to Banaras it appears as Ganga. After its practical disappearance at Hardwar, up towards the source just before we lose it altogether, it is given as Ganges. It is again Ganges, just after leaving Banaras, and after that is named no more. Eleven of the innumerable heads that pour their waters out into the sea at the Delta of Calcutta are given names, but Ganges is not one of them. It seems, in fact, to have become for all practical purposes all rivers; one might almost say, as its waters flow out to sea and encircle the whole earth, that it has become all things. However that may be, finally, with a wide expansive gesture Mr. Bartholomew (and Sons) draws a great dotted line from the Hooghly to the Karnaphuli at Chittagong, inscribing beneath it in small print '330 miles', and above it in bold type 'Mouths of the Ganges'.

Perhaps I should add here, since it is typical of the present situation in India, that I found it quite impossible to buy a reasonably large-scale map of any part of India; in fact not possible to buy any map at all with contours, minor roads and rivers etc. such as the Bartholomew's map I have mentioned. The official Tourist Information Bureaux could not help, though it was clear that they were very desirous to be helpful. I tried the principal bookshops and university publishers in such places as Bombay, Poona, Trivandrum, and even the Government Publications Department (Maps) in Bombay, but with no success. Finally (three years ago) in one of the principal bookshops of Poona, possibly showing by this time slight signs of exasperation, I asked why it should be so difficult to acquire such a map, and was told that they had all been withdrawn for security reasons.

I must confess here that it was only after I had already decided on my route that I was struck by the peculiar aptness of the Ganges as the symbol and personification of Hinduism itself, and by the fact that the places I had been advised by different people to visit all fell into their natural place on the sacred river: all had a direct association with it.

The principal districts I was advised to concentrate on were Banaras, Rishikesh, Almora. Considering this advice carefully in the light of my own speculations, I decided that, generally speaking, of these three areas it was at Banaras that I must expect to find popular religion in its most intensive characteristic form. It is to Banaras that all turn in pilgrimage, where all would wish to die and to 'receive their due of fire'. A further inducement was the promise that I would find there one of the most observant Hindu monasteries, and I had an introduction to an English-speaking swami of this monastery. Further I could meet there an Indian Christian, a priest and Hindu scholar who had himself travelled in the Himalayas visiting sadhus and ashrams. By him I hoped to be put in touch with sadhus of the most advanced type in the remote corners of Almora, covering roughly the district in which the Ganges has its source. At Rishikesh is perhaps the most widely known centre of yogic studies, widely known, that is, both in India and abroad, with centres in many parts of the world, in England and U.S.A. especially; it also conducts a vigorous

campaign by literature in many languages and by correspondence. There is also there a specially big concentration of Hindu monks, of the kind who live in community. It is a spot visited by people of many nationalities.

The position of Rishikesh, at the point where the Ganges descends from the hills and begins its course across the plains, might well be, so it seemed to me, symbolic of its place in Hinduism. I might expect to find there the higher reaches of Hinduism adapted to the level of the ordinary man and set down in some logical scheme, the indefinable acquiring thereby some degree of definition. In the nature of things I might possibly find the ascetics of the Himalayas transformed here to a not so strenuous professional standard. I was told that the number of monks here, permanently resident that is, was estimated at three to four thousand, divided among a number of ashrams or monasteries. I was not so interested in these as in the yoga centre, the source of the methodical, scientific study of yoga. I would be glad, that is, to learn something of them at first hand in the short time at my disposal; to make a balanced assessment of them as a whole would obviously require a fairly long period of daily contact and close study, and that only after I had overcome the preliminary barriers instinctively thrown up against one who might be coming as a hostile critic.

It seems to be inevitable, humanly speaking, in monastic communities, Christian and non-Christian, that the first springtime of fervour in the beginning of their foundation should be followed by a period of decline, and that, generally speaking, with increase of numbers (though there are notable exceptions to this) and certainly with increase in temporal goods, the standard is lowered. It is always easier to go down-hill than up, and no human society, no matter how high its ideals, remains at a high level for very long. It must inevitably decline. If it is fundamentally sound it may expect to experience periods of revival and reform, but these will arise from a return to its sources and will usually begin with a few individuals who in the initial stage will be going against the stream and appear in the nature of things as rebels, as not quite belonging.

Here then, at Rishikesh, I would expect to find among these numerous monastic communities or ashrams a certain descent from the heights into the plains: possibly a few individuals of

outstanding sanctity, a few bad lots, and a large majority who were neither very hot nor very cold. Anything else would have been a negation of all human experience—unless, that is, it was true that in India one might find saints and sages blossoming at every turn, as some writers lead one to expect.

I should then be looking for the higher reaches of Hinduism, its highest practical exposition, around the sources of the Ganges, in the Almora district. Its theory and scientific exposition, its adaptation to limited material categories, with, inevitably, human limitations, I should hope to find at Rishikesh where the river descends to the plains. At Banaras I might reasonably expect to study it as expressed in popular practice. In terms of my former expression of looking for a 'true yogi' I would expect to find the most advanced, truly spiritual type in Almora, at Rishikesh the scientific study and practical exposition of the external phenomena of yoga, and at Banaras these latter exhibited for public display in a mixture of the genuine with the fraudulent. This would be the main line I should follow; but I would naturally be prepared to be diverted to any bypath that might promise to lead more expeditiously towards my goal.

As for Calcutta, where this sacred river becomes such a many-headed monster, I did not intend to visit this. To trace the spirit of the original Ganges here would be almost as difficult as attempting a study of all the forms Hinduism has taken in the course of its three thousand years or so of history, to trace them back to the source and from a conspectus of them evolve a satisfactory definition of Hinduism. No one has yet succeeded in this and I am not so rash or foolish as to suppose that I would accomplish it in what may be left to me of one only lifetime. I have seen several of the larger cities of India, north, central and south, as well as smaller towns and many villages, and I have no reason to suppose that Calcutta differs substantially from any of these. Experience has led me to believe that great cosmopolitan cities such as Calcutta and Bombay vary comparatively little; the life of the spirit is still the life of these, by whatever tortuous channels it may flow and however revolting the debris strewn along its course, but my primary purpose was not the investigation of this, rather a search for its source, the life and motive power of it all.

Omitting, then, the large town—of Calcutta, at least; I shall say something of Bombay—the logical order for one wishing to trace religious observance, and indeed the whole conduct of human life and the world itself, to its source, would have been Banaras, Rishikesh, Almora. In fact it was more convenient for me to visit Almora before Rishikesh. Banaras I certainly wished to see first, in order, as I have said, to get some pointers and possible introductions to sadhus in Almora. Rishikesh I preferred to visit after Almora, partly because Rishikesh seemed to offer a more direct route back to Bombay and would save me doubling on my tracks; but also, it must be admitted, because I sensed that the Irish and Scots teaching brothers who were to be my hosts at Dehra Dun, my centre for Rishikesh, were likely to be congenial companions with whom to spend Christmas. I would gladly have passed this in complete solitude—*numquam minus solus quam cum solus*—but this not being practicable I can think of many more pleasant ways of spending Christmas than in a third-rate Indian hotel or a dak bungalow in the more remote fastnesses of Almora. In the event I contrived to arrive at Dehra Dun, some thirty miles from Rishikesh, on the Christmas Eve.

My proposed route, then, was: Bombay, Banaras, Lucknow (where I knew I could get information and insight into many aspects of Indian life), Bhowali (chiefly in order to visit Naukuchiatal, and consider its possibilities as a site for a Benedictine monastery, but also to gather information as I went), Ranikhet as a centre for Almora, Dehra Dun as a convenient centre for visiting Rishikesh and for gathering information about it beforehand. I had booked a passage as far as Suez on an Anchor Line cargo-passenger vessel, due to sail from Bombay 'on or about January 8th' (in fact it did not sail until eleven days later), and before travelling north I intended to take my baggage to Bombay and make arrangements for money transfer, income tax clearance, visas, and in general to surmount the thousand and one obstacles designed by thoughtful governments to deter the would-be traveller from travelling, and in particular perhaps to impress on the vagrant monk the unwisdom of wandering abroad, 'for this is by no means expedient for their souls'.

I planned to leave Purandhar at the end of November.

Having set the wheels in motion in Bombay I should, I hoped, be able to return and complete the formalities in a couple of days before my boat sailed. Since Bombay is a big Indian city (the 'Second City of the Empire'—so it was claimed—in days when there was an empire) and so in many ways presumably not unlike Calcutta, except that the latter has an exceptionally large Chinese population, a brief description of this, my second visit to Bombay, may give a general idea of what one would be likely to find in Calcutta where the Ganges loses itself in the ocean. Several incidents I shall relate will prepare for what I shall have to say later.

1. Banaras

ON THE ROAD: BOMBAY

One of the disadvantages of living on top of a hill is that all supplies have to be carried up on the heads of coolies. More serious still, if one is doing any building the material for this has to be carried up in the same way, unless one is prepared to hire from a distance a fleet of donkeys (or whatever the collective noun is). This in fact seemed likely to be a serious problem when I first considered the possibility of settling in Purandhar Fort. The nearest town, Poona, was twenty-four miles away, with an additional two miles of hill, and from Poona I anticipated having to obtain most of our supplies. I hoped for very little from the village six miles from the foot of the hill, except possibly vegetables and fruit. Whichever of the two our supplies came from, the cartage was likely to add considerably to the cost. The accepted remuneration for carrying half a maund (40 lb.) up the hill (80 lb. is a full load on the level) was four annas (about 4½*d.* at present); at the end of the last war it was two annas. This I had ascertained from a man living in Poona, an Indian, who in the time of the British occupation had a general store in the fort and also contracted for the provision of bread to the garrison. Not unnaturally he was anxious that we should not pay more than the generally accepted amount, which seemed to me iniquitously small. As a matter of course the coolies always demanded with deep indignation at least twice as much as they expected to receive, and I usually compromised by paying them the exact recognized amount until they realized that I knew what this was and was not to be fooled; then I gave them extra as baksheesh. From casual visitors they of course always extracted more.

It is an index to the poverty of the people that the local

peasants, who were not by any means the poorest, or even very poor by Indian standards, were only too eager to act as coolies even at the minimum wage, and whenever one arrived at the foot of the hill with a load a small crowd of them would appear as if by magic. The amounts involved may seem ridiculously small, yet added to the cost of transport to the foot of the hill they raised the cost of living quite considerably. It is, however, surprising what can be carried on the head. Sometimes I have looked down from the rampart and seen men (or women) like corrugated sheets walking, reminding one of a line of gigantic snails toiling up the hillside, or like one of those illustrations one used to find in Latin Readers of Roman soldiers forming a *testudo* as they advanced to attack some walled town.

In fact the problem of supplies worked out more easily in practice than I had anticipated, as such problems have a way of doing. Our cook went into the village once a week, on market day, and came back with vegetables and also with other supplies, since it turned out that more could be bought in the village than I had expected, and the man with whom we began to deal regularly was always willing, and even anxious, to obtain for us anything he happened not to have in stock. On one occasion when I had queried the price of something, I received a note in English, obviously written for him by someone who knew English, to the effect that 'our prices are always right'. There was more to it, but this appeared at intervals like a refrain in a Greek chorus. I find it difficult to believe that any single individual in this wicked world can be right all the time, but on checking up I decided that on this occasion he might be right. With, in addition, a visit to Poona by myself once a month or so we managed remarkably well. One of the biggest problems of transport—or so it seemed to me at first—came when I was preparing to leave.

I had packed my books into one large wooden case, not a very large number, and I felt obliged to take them with me since my future was indefinite; I might have to repeat something similar to this present effort under similar conditions, and such a minimum number of books would be essential. There was also a battered trunk containing clothing and oddments, and I wanted both of these sent on ahead. The trunk presented no problems; the box of books, however, when packed and

nailed up seemed at first to weigh about half a ton, and though I reduced this on more mature reflection to a probable four hundredweight, it was a very considerable burden to be carried down a hill. A young man who had gradually come to fill the position of a kind of agent in such matters decided that four men could carry it on their heads. I was a little dubious; there is always the problem of first lifting a heavy load on to the head and taking it off. However, he seemed to know and undertook to supply men.

This seemed satisfactory, but when the day and the hour came there arrived not four men but four young, very slightly-built women. I was told it was market day and all the men had gone to market. I took one look at them and said it was quite impossible for them to carry such a load: they would kill themselves; it must wait until the men returned. It is to the credit of such women that they never argue in a case like this, at least not with a 'padre sahib'; but it was evident from the looks they cast at one another that they were disappointed and a little indignant. They retired in silence to a short distance and squatted on the ground in a little circle, waiting to see what would happen. What did happen was that two independent witnesses who passed by, one the man who brought our milk, the other one of the chowkidars, both assured us that the women were well able to carry such a load and did in fact carry heavier burdens. Since it was evident that they wanted to take it I allowed them to try it, feeling rather like a baby-killer. It was hoisted on to their heads and they set off, one at each corner and walking in step with an easy rhythm and apparently without undue effort, though I had half expected to see them flattened out beneath it. Fortunately—or unfortunately, whichever way you look at it—it is impossible to put down such a load unaided; should they try to do so, one or other is liable to incur considerable danger. I did look down from the wall several times to see how they were progressing. At one point they were apparently changing positions very skilfully so that the two at the back should take a turn at the front, but otherwise they seemed to be moving at a steady pace and without sign of undue discomfort. But I still think they more than earned their pay.

Having thus disposed of my heavier baggage I myself

followed on a few days later with the rest. Halfway down the hill I was met by an old woman of the 'sweeper' caste,[1] carrying a small grandchild not more than three years of age. She was on her way to see me. Although I had not broadcast it the people of the neighbouring small hamlets had come to hear that I was about to leave, and for the past week my packing and business connected with the task of handing over had been interrupted by people who were not ill but anticipated that at some future date they probably would be, and so wanted a little stock of the medicine that had cured them before. Some of them whom I had not seen before I suspected wanted it as a kind of sacramental, the vehicle of divine power and so efficacious in all troubles—if one's karma so dictated it. I had in fact let my stocks run low, since I did not anticipate that the Indian Father would wish to take over this branch; but I did hand out what I had. This old woman, who had often come to me before on behalf of herself or one of her numerous children or grandchildren or step-grandchildren (she was one of two wives of the same husband, now dead; sisters, who seemed to get on reasonably well together), had characteristically left the visit until the last possible moment. It was not necessary for her to tell me what was wrong with the child; this was only too evident: malnutrition radically, the most common of all troubles in India. Calcium, shark-liver oil and orange juice—in addition to a balanced meal at regular intervals—was indicated, and of these all I had to offer was the calcium from the small stock still remaining in my medical chest at the top of the hill. She had little hope of ever being able to acquire the rest. I was not sorry when I was able to continue my way; I could not stop long. The thought that even the food wasted in countries such as the United States and Great Britain could bring new life and a whole new world to thousands of such children, and of what even a small fraction of the energy of our politicians could do in diverting surplus food free to such countries as this, is not good for the blood pressure in one of my slightly choleric temperament.

[1] This, the name of one of the lowest castes, is really something of a euphemism. They do indeed 'sweep', but their principal duty is the care of the toilet, especially where there is no piped water supply. They are commonly the equivalent of the army 'sanitary men'.

I intended to travel to Poona by the bus that arrives at the foot of the hill round about 9.30 a.m. and leaves almost immediately. Since it happened to be market day in Saswad I was able to notice small significant incidents I had not seen before on my much earlier journeys by milk truck. For instance, there was a long train of women moving towards the market with their characteristic steady trot, sari pulled up tightly between the legs (the things they are able to do with this garment, a nine yard strip of cloth, have always been a matter of marvel to me) leaving them bare to the knee, and on their heads an incredibly large bundle of firewood, on average of five to six feet long and two feet in diameter. This was for sale in the weekly market; the money gained from the sale of it would be spent on small portions of the more basic foods, here probably *ragi*, a grain like a very inferior maize, with a very low nutritional value. Our cook, who was travelling with me as far as the market for his weekly purchases, told me that one of these bundles brought from one to one and a half rupees (1*s*. 6*d*.–2*s*. 3*d*.) according to the size and quality of the wood. Assuming that the women came from no further than the neighbouring Purandhar hills (there is no doubt that many of them came from more than twice that distance) they would walk at least six miles each way; the gathering of the wood from the sparsely-wooded hillsides would involve at least a day's work, and the barter at the market might occupy the greater part of the market day.

The gathering of this wood and its sale at a *comparatively* high price underlines one of India's great problems: shortage of cheap fuel for at least cooking (if one leaves out of consideration heating, in the districts where this is necessary at some time of the year) and for heavy industry. The most common fuel in the villages is the dung of the cow or buffalo, patted affectionately into flat round cakes and dried in the sun, commonly stuck for this purpose on to the walls of houses. Those who are prosperous enough to have so much then store it in small stacks, in shape not unlike the much bigger stacks of peat or turf in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. It is not uncommon to see women or children in country districts, with baskets on their heads, following the cattle as they go out to pasture or water, pouncing on the precious droppings as they are produced and

transferring them dexterously to the basket with one skilful scoop of the hand. When one considers that it is still the common flooring for village houses, requiring to be relaid fairly frequently; that it is also often used for lining mud walls, for forming, mixed with water, a very special carpet in the street outside one's house; for sundry minor household tasks such as lining baskets and for polishing the family kitchen utensils; and that, freshly strewn, it is traditionally the only fit bed for a brahmin,[1] small wonder that I was never able to see any of it being used as manure for agriculture. In fact I looked in vain for signs of fertilizers of any kind on the small village fields, and was never able to understand how the farmers managed to keep them in reasonably good heart, since I never saw any use of night soil. Government exhorts farmers to use animal manure for their fields, but until a cheap alternative fuel is provided this must remain ineffective. Our own fuel was kerosene, carried up the hill in four-gallon cans, and this, though efficient in the Valor-type stove, is an expensive form of fuel and beyond the means of the poorer villagers.

I reached my train at Poona with no untoward incident except for the fact that there was just fifteen minutes left in which to cover the three miles between the bus terminus and the railway station and the taxi could not (or would not) come into the bus enclosure, while the coolies clearly would not carry my baggage out to the taxi but demanded that the taxi come in. I have no doubt that the same thing had happened there frequently before, but this is typically eastern: the day is made for discussion and friendly argument, and how could man spend it better? However, this was no time for friendly discussion or gentle persuasion; if I missed my train I should have a wait of several hours and arrive in Bombay at an awkward time: I demonstrated my eloquence to the coolies in sight with the full force, or nearly full force, of my voice. It is doubtful if they understood a word I said, but they must have been impressed by the way I said it, for my baggage was carried forthwith out to the taxi. I left them expostulating on the size of their tip and arrived at the railway station with just sufficient time to buy my ticket and board the train.

As we neared Bombay, and the railway track ran parallel

[1] I think brahmins today are tending to forgo this privilege.

with the road, I noticed a large blue and cream state transport bus with the destination plate bearing the single word 'Sion'. The bus was not heading, at least not immediately, for 'the Holy City, the New Jerusalem' as one might perhaps suppose; Sion is a suburb of Bombay. I do not know how it came by its name: it has indeed a Christian church, an old Portuguese foundation now under the charge of three English and Scots Franciscan Friars; but it is not more—it is probably less—Christian than the rest of Bombay. I mention it as typical of the mixture that is India, where one may pass a row of small open-fronted shops all displaying for sale, with a large impartiality, framed, highly-coloured pictures of a considerable portion of the pantheon (Hindu gods and saints interspersed with the most lurid oleographs of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady, St. Antony [a special favourite in India] and many others). On my last expedition to Poona I noted on a fifteen-minute bus journey along the main road from the city market to the cantonment the following:

(1) A large poster advertising: 'Perfumed Castor Oil', offered not as a less unpleasant purgative but for anointing the hair, especially of women.

(2) The consulting-rooms of a man who announced himself in large letters as a 'Face Reader'.

(3) The 'Wel-come [very popular this] Bar and Coffee House'.

(4) 'Help of God Restaurant'.

(5) At a corner of two main roads, at the edge of the pavement, in an attractively-tiled cubical shrine, a red, gross, pot-bellied, stony-eyed idol, with lights and incense burning before it and receiving the worship of occasional passers-by. On the opposite side of the road, a little further on, a small temple with, typically, a bell in front which worshippers rang as they approached for *puja* (worship).

(6) Office of the 'Deputy Assistant Director of Agricultural Animals'. (I have no reason to think that this gentleman was not doing an excellent work, but the number of government departments with endless ramifications that have sprung up during the past few years tend to make one rather cynical, and this name amused me.)

(7) Y.M.C.A.

(8) I alighted from the bus at St. Vincent's Street, leading

to the Jesuit St. Vincent's School, which has trained a high proportion of the better-class citizens of Poona of all religions. At the corner another small Hindu temple behind walls, the entrance flanked by bright yellow conventional lions; seated at one side a young man beating a drum. Past it walked two small girls in western-styled school uniform complete with tartan ties of what looked to me like Mackenzie clan, though I am not well up in clan tartans. I recognized the uniform of the convent school in Convent Street, opening off St. Vincent Street; but since they did not greet me I assumed that they were Hindu, Moslem or Parsee, like all but a small minority of the pupils.

(9) A few yards down the road, on the opposite side, was Synagogue Street, leading to the Jewish synagogue. It was in this street that some months before I met a charming Persian girl of school age who had come to India to learn English and was learning it from an Indian lady with a Portuguese name. (It was the deplorable custom of the Portuguese colonizers to impose their own names on their Indian converts to Christianity.) If the reader should wonder at my own connection with this ménage, I was negotiating for the printing of labels for tins of incense we were producing for sale, only one ingredient of which was not imported, although I had made exhaustive enquiries for suitable home-produced gums from merchants, botanists and forestry officers. Wherever the Wise Men from the East got their incense, it was certainly not India.

I mention these few incidents as illustrating the complexity, the cosmopolitanism, the catholicity or universality of Indian life, and the difficulty of defining its essential spirit. The relationship of Christian to non-Christian is especially difficult to assess. An Anglican missionary of long experience, about to leave for a professorial post in St. Augustine's Theological College, Canterbury, was perhaps nearest the truth in suggesting that Christianity was now accepted in India as simply another caste. I have the impression that there is probably less latent hostility towards Christians on the part of Hindus than there is towards Moslems.

The number and comparative solidarity of Catholics in big cities such as Bombay (Anglicans have decreased considerably since the British withdrawal) is impressive. The parish in which I received hospitality on first landing in India (Byculla) com-

prised nearly 13,000 Catholics, and had a large high school with a long waiting list adjoining the church. These Christian, and particularly the Catholic, schools are one of the most striking features of the Indian scene. Only a very small proportion of the pupils are Christians. The rulers of the country regularly exhort the people to send their children to Hindu schools, but they themselves, as is well known, send their children to these 'mission schools'. The results are sometimes perplexing. No Catholic school makes any attempt at the 'conversion' of its non-Christian pupils; this would be a betrayal of the trust of the parents. Still all of them, I think, have a course in morals and ethics which is in effect Christian ethics, since this is simply a closer definition and elaboration of the unwritten natural law. Most of them seem to include, with of course the full knowledge and approval of the parents, some account of the life of Christ and reading of the Bible, and an outline of church history. This is in full accord with the spirit of Hinduism, ready to honour all holy men and prepared to accept Christ as at least one incarnation of God.

Some Catholic schools allow, without actively encouraging it, attendance at Catholic religious services in the school (this principally, from the nature of the case, in boarding schools): others actively discourage such attendance, or positively forbid it as incompatible with sincerity in the practice of any religion. There are sometimes odd results. A nun teacher in a large, palatial, beautifully-kept and I should think very efficient convent school in the North of India, told me that at the end of the last long school vacation one Hindu girl came to her and said she 'had been to the [Hindu] temple every day during the holidays'. Sister: 'Really? And what prayers did you say?' Girl: 'Oh, just the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary".'

It was of such a complex society that I was seeking the heart or soul. But, to return to Bombay, I had two clear days in which to arrange matters of currency exchange, visas, etc. Instead of booking a passage straight through by one of the regular routes I wanted to leave the ship at Port Said (or at Suez if necessary, and in fact it was), obtain a passage from there to Greece, proceed by rail to Germany, where I hoped to interest one or two friendly Benedictine communities in the project of a monastic foundation in India, and thence to

England. But this, I was made to understand, was a most novel manœuvre, liable to arouse grave suspicion. The Anchor Line were very co-operative, quite willing to put me ashore at Suez and offering to carry my baggage on to Liverpool without extra charge. But the foreign currency necessary for this was a very different matter. I had obtained a bank draft from home sufficient to cover my travelling expenses. But to spend this outside the sterling area? 'No! No!' said the Reserve Bank of India whose special approval was needed before travellers' cheques could be issued. However, the kindness and perseverance of the State Bank official who dealt with matters of foreign currency obtained what I wanted, and it was ready waiting for me when I returned from the North. (In India it is only on the rarest occasions that someone cannot be found prepared to take any amount of trouble to help one out of a difficulty.)

Although I am unable to say anything from personal knowledge about Calcutta, I think I should not leave a big city such as Bombay without some reference to the peculiar character of Indian Catholicism, especially in view of the ease, as already mentioned, with which the Hindu is able to join in its services, finding there, apparently, an incarnation or materialization of the unseen power dwelling in the fastnesses of the Himalayas; one of the many heads developed by the sacred stream at the conclusion of its visible course.

To the uninitiated it is startling to find so many Portuguese names borne by people who are so obviously Indian: De Souza, Dias, Pereira, Pinto, Fernandes, D'Cruz, D'Sa are especially common. It is always safe to assume that these are Catholics. To a less extent one finds people in fairly large numbers with English names, though it is often obvious that they are neither English nor Anglo-Indian (i.e. of mixed English and Indian blood): these may be of any religion but are usually Christian. In the days of British rule the offspring of marriages between English and Indian easily obtained employment in government service and received many minor privileges. They were not received by either British or Indian, but in general their sympathy and loyalty lay with the British rather than the Indian; they liked to link themselves as closely as possible to the ruling class. But the number was swelled by Indians with no British blood who took English names, usually

the English name that resembled somewhat the sound of their Indian name, in the hope of entry into the privileges and remunerative posts of the genuine Anglo-Indian. Such were, of course, generally recognized for what they were by both British and Indian, but the change of name did tend to open the way to government employment; their readiness to take a British name suggested a readiness to accept British rule, and at any rate in such employment they would realize on which side their bread was buttered. By the familiar Vicar of Bray technique some of these latter reverted to their original Indian names when independence came. Large numbers of genuine Anglo-Indians left India then; but one still meets, especially among Christians, Catholic or Protestant, English names borne by people who are Anglo-Indian or pure Indian.

The origin of the Portuguese names is different. There was undoubtedly some intermarriage, or more frequently extra-marital relations, between Indians and the Portuguese colonists of the sixteenth century and onwards, but generally speaking these Portuguese names arose from the practice of giving converts to Christianity, when they were baptized, the name of their (Portuguese) sponsor; not only the first name was 'christened', but the whole name became a 'christian' name. Thus, if one man stood sponsor for a group of three hundred Indian converts, there would henceforth be three hundred extra de Souzas, Fernandes, or what you will, and these names would be multiplied and perpetuated by marriage.

This was no accident but a deliberate policy on the part of the Portuguese, to make their converts 'first Portuguese, then Catholic', as some of them openly expressed it. This has, needless to say, never been the official policy of the Catholic Church. Her own approach is that exemplified in the instructions of Pope Gregory to Augustine in the sixth century, not to destroy the pagan Saxon social customs and religious rites but to 'christen' them, adapting to Christianity where adaptation was necessary. In consequence the greatest festival of the Christian year is still named in England *Eastre* after the pagan Goddess of Spring. But the iron hand of Rome controlling rigidly every thought and deed of every Catholic throughout the world is largely a Protestant myth. A recent pope remarked sadly that the pope does indeed give orders but these are not always

obeyed. The policy of her official representatives in distant parts of the world—or even sometimes in Rome itself for that matter—by no means always reflects the policy, or even the official directives or direct orders, of the Head of the Church. When this happens the Church has to use diplomacy and tact in order to win what she can, rather than run the risk of losing the whole. This is especially true where heads of state interfere unduly in matters of religion.

In recent years, with the rise of intense national feeling, particularly among colonial peoples, the Church has explicitly declared the desirability of 'adaptation', of adapting the externals and non-essentials of religion, in dress, art, architecture, music, language and spontaneous exhibitions of devotion, to the native genius. The present situation in India in this respect is extremely delicate. I can only express my own personal views and speak subject to correction.

The Portuguese policy has bred a closely-knit body of Catholics who, in name, dress, education, language, religion, art, architecture, and to a high degree social customs, are European. In the days of European rule they no doubt considered this as setting them a cut above their Indian fellow-countrymen. It also gave them a measure of economic security—they would be assisted in need, educated, and find employment more easily—and to those without caste it gave a quasi-caste. It is not my intention to enter into a full discussion of this question of adaptation with reference to India; it is an extremely complex and controversial one; but it is necessary to mention its existence in passing. I think it is true to say, with as much truth as any generalization will carry, that by a strange paradox it is now the European missionary who is most anxious to implement this policy of adapting religion to Indian ways, and the Indian (I mean the Indian Christian) who tends to resist it vigorously. 'You have given us our religion,' they say, 'in this particular dress; in effect you have made us Europeans; and now, after four hundred years, you tell us it is all wrong, that we must change everything and "go all Indian", and that at a time when all other Indians who can afford to do so are becoming westernized and European.' The logic of this, as far as it goes, is unassailable. It is not part of my duty to make an assessment or to offer practical suggestions. I would

only say that one who wishes to view the matter in its true perspective must consider the following facts.

First of all Christianity in India is not a 'foreign religion'. This is publicly admitted by the President and Prime Minister. It is claimed that it dates back to St. Thomas the Apostle. It is, in fact, difficult to know what could be a 'foreign religion' in India with its complex society of Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems, Sikhs, Parsees, Jains, Tribals, of which the most typically Indian, Hinduism, is claimed by some to have originated in the Arctic Circle. If 'western' is the criterion of a 'foreign' religion Christianity did admittedly arise west of India but east of Europe and is eastern rather than western in the overall picture. Its scripture is in fact much more easily intelligible to the eastern than to the western mind. If the meaning is that Christianity has been presented in western dress and interpreted in western forms, and imported, at least after the apostolic age, linked with a policy of trade or colonization, this is undoubtedly true. All the same, if we are now going to 'adapt' it, we have to decide to what it is to be adapted in a country where dress, for instance, varies from the simple loincloth of the Malabar fisherman through an infinite variety to the linen jodhpurs of the northern peasant, and at a time when the tendency is for dress, to confine ourselves to this, to become more and more standardized, not so much western as cosmopolitan once one reaches a certain social level.

There is another aspect of this which one approaches with some fear and trembling. The bias against a 'foreign', or what is said to be a foreign, religion, and against the foreign dress in which it is presented, is, it seems to me, only a reflection of a wider, more general nationalist and anti-foreign feeling which is losing fire since independence. Claims of universal superiority hide in fact a great thirst to absorb from the West all that is worth having—perhaps one should rather say all that is *considered* worth having—combined with a certain resentment that there should be anything there worth absorbing. I saw little evidence of a revival of a national indigenous culture. This struck me very forcibly from a reading of Mr. Nehru's *Autobiography*. He does not dislike Englishmen or British institutions; he goes out of his way to say this repeatedly. Only he wants them for himself, under his control; and in this he is

typical of the majority of his fellow-countrymen. Reasonable enough, surely. Unfortunately India often out-wests the West, adopting western manners and standards in their most vulgar and debased form. This is nowhere more evident than in the sphere of church art, architecture, vestments, music and in general the externals of religion. No one can doubt the desirability of preserving, cultivating and developing the indigenous culture of India, which is in danger of being swamped by the offscourings of the West, and it is certainly a province in which the Church could and should give a lead. There is already a small but vigorous body working towards that end. It is a question of tactics.

All this is closely bound up with the Goa question. A high proportion of Indian Catholics are Goanese or of Goanese extraction; they have, that is, a Portuguese tradition. These, and to a less degree the others, have over the centuries evolved a ceremonial, or perhaps rather infused a spirit into the ceremonial, that to my observation has much in common with the externals of Hindu worship. The gay, colourful, to northern taste rather garish, externals of religious worship in Southern Europe, with its heavily ornate gilded altars, its lights, flowers, banners, elaborate and rather unorderly processions, instrumental music, festas with their accompaniment of feasting and dancing, surging and, it must be admitted, not very decorous crowds of devotees (again from a northern standpoint)—all this must have found a ready response in the Indian converts of the first Portuguese traders. Perhaps for that matter it was not so very far removed from the spirit of our own medieval English ancestors. Over the centuries this external wrapping has received a typically Indian modification, giving it a flavour and character all its own, noticeable especially in, for instance, Goanese music. I had an opportunity of experiencing this on my passage to India in an Anchor Line boat which has Goanese stewards. We had a sung mass one Sunday at which these stewards sang their traditional, strangely haunting melodies, accompanied by string instruments, mostly violins but including at least one home-made (which I had an opportunity to observe before at an impromptu concert in the forecastle), rather like an elongated one-string double-bass, which was very effective in marking the rhythm of the melody.

When I later visited Bassein, some twenty miles north of Bombay and the original port of the Portuguese before Bombay arose, and saw the typical Portuguese churches with their heavily carved and gilded altars and pulpits, their attitudinizing statuary and the 'props' of their processions and Lenten tableaux of the Passion, my immediate impression was that if it was absolutely necessary to force India into a western mould (which I do not admit), then it would have been difficult to find one better adapted to their natural inclinations, unless possibly that of Malta. Incidentally, these Bassein Catholics, numbering between forty and fifty per cent of the population, mostly fishermen or betel-nut growers, are still almost indistinguishable in dress and social customs from their Hindu neighbours. The Syrian Rite Catholics of Kerala, 'St. Thomas Christians' as they are often called, with their more elaborate eastern, partly vernacular, liturgy, are a distinctive and closely-knit body. The Indian clergy are largely recruited from these, with typically South Indian names, and from Goanese; but since a Syrian Rite (strictly, Syro-Malankara and Syro-Malabar Rite) priest may use the Latin Rite, clergy recruited from the South become for all practical purposes Latin.

I must confess frankly that I personally find all this noise, bustle and exuberance distasteful in the extreme as an accompaniment of religious worship. After celebrating Mass in such circumstances, or when I am obliged to recite Office privately, I invariably retreat to the quiet of my own room. But then I am neither Indian nor Portuguese; my foreign friends in various parts of the world have usually described me as 'very English'. This may be an indication of my limitations: but there it is.

On the second day after arriving in Bombay, the evening before I set out for the North, I had the opportunity of being present at the initial, the more religious, stages of a typical Goanese festa, the most typically Indian Christian festa, that is if one excludes those of the Syrian Catholics. It was not in Goa, but in the neighbouring parish, which was that of the Goanese quarter of Bombay. It was the Eve of the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, Apostle of India, whose body rests in Goa in a glass case, incorrupt but steadily decreasing in size they say;

to the consternation of the Goanese, who believe their security depends on possession of the body. The church of this parish was dedicated to the saint, and I was taken by my host (who incidentally was not a Goanese) to assist at first vespers of the feast. I had been inveigled into assisting at such ceremonies in Malta during the last war and thought I knew what to expect in India. I was not disappointed.

Leaving the busy main road, one of the busiest in Bombay, we turned down what is usually a quiet side-street, now filled with a jostling crowd beneath streamers and garlands strung across the road from house to house, and past the sweet and tea stalls so common in India that spring up with a special luxuriance at any suggestion of a pilgrimage or feast. Before us rose a massive Gothic church, of not unpleasing proportions if one abstracts from the incongruity of finding a Gothic building at all in India. This might have been lifted bodily from any English modern provincial town. On the left-hand side as one approached was a large parish hall and in the rear, flanking it at right angles and adjoining the clergy house, a great block of imposing stone buildings which I found was 'St. Sebastian's High School'. The whole group of buildings was impressive. They were all lighted up and presumably presaged the dancing and merry-making which accompany religious festivals in Goa.

Entering the sacristy (the vestry) we found a large party of city clergy already assembled, including the surprisingly young vicar general of the archdiocese who was to officiate at vespers. After the usual handshakes (typical in that it was the western greeting not the Indian), whispered greetings and introductions, we formed up and, headed by acolytes with cross and lighted candles, we, also carrying candles (not a normal procedure in my experience), proceeded out of the sacristy in procession, down the street and in at the church by the west door; presumably to give added dignity to the occasion by a procession of clergy down the whole length of the nave to a temporarily enlarged choir before the sanctuary.

The high altar before which we found ourselves was a massive, almost overpowering affair, with a great reredos rising tier upon tier, crowned at the apex by a large realistic statue of St. Francis Xavier, attired in cassock, cotta and stole and holding a cross. Altar, cross and tabernacle tended to become

simply a frame for this. The church was filled and overflowing. I remember that there were some seats—there normally are in city churches—but they were almost invisible in the crowds that stood everywhere, leaving barely sufficient space for the procession to move down, then closing in behind it like a tidal wave and surging right up to the steps of the sanctuary. It was a typically sultry Bombay evening, hot and sticky outside, and made still hotter and stickier inside by the presence of so many people and the myriads of candles on the altar. The boy altar servers in the benches in front of us wore cassocks of scarlet satin, with white Elizabethan ruffs round the neck which continually fluttered in the breeze from the electric fans, like so many flowers in some colourful exotic garden. (These electric fans are common in public buildings and the better-class private houses in cities where current is available.)

All turned towards the high altar and the officiating priest intoned the opening words of the office: *Deus in adiutorium meum intende*. There broke out immediately the throb and wail of the violins of a massed string orchestra from the west gallery of the church, and after a very long introduction the choir, invisible but presumably also in the west gallery, began the response: *Domine ad adiuvandum me festina*. Simultaneously there came from outside, through the open doors of the church, the noise of a series of shattering explosions which recalled dim memories of some of Montgomery's artillery barrages in his more aggressive moods. Second thoughts assured me that it must be merely a *feu de joie*. Indian fireworks do tend to be excessively noisy and even dangerous, but these surpassed all I had previously heard. This, the orchestra, the repetition with countless variations of the choir's response and the noise of the barrage continued for a period of five to ten minutes (I would not like to assess it more accurately than that) while we, the clergy, stood waiting to get on with the job. It was in this light that the situation presented itself to me, and I did certainly in the interval of waiting wonder vaguely how long it would take to get through vespers of five psalms with antiphons, short lesson, hymn, versicle, canticle and prayer, at the present rate of progress. But things are rarely as bad as they seem. The singing of the invisible polyphonic choir came to an end; the fireworks ceased; two of the clergy came to the centre of the choir to

function as cantors and intoned the antiphon of the first psalm, and this was taken up, after a little initial hesitation, by the rest of the clergy. The psalm followed, alternate verses sung by the clergy in plainsong and the choir in polyphony, introduced each time by a lengthy, but not quite so long as the first, introduction from the orchestra.

The lay people were mute but interested spectators. They rarely saw so many of their clergy all together at one time and scarcely ever making so much joyful noise. It was at this stage, soon after the beginning, that a small brown girl of about three years of age broke out of the crowd, penetrated into the sanctuary, and stood for a moment directly in front of me in open-mouthed and wide-eyed admiration, contemplating in silent interest and awe the spectacle of this priest with the queer white skin and unusual monastic dress; then, as though withdrawn by some electronic guidance, or more probably by telepathic control from her mother, retired in good order.

I cannot honestly say that this rendering of western music was artistically good, by whatever standard one might judge it, but the setting, the immense congregation, the volume of sound from choir and orchestra, and in general the festive air, was impressive. It reminded me of similar festas in Malta during the war years, with the exception that at these all the fireworks available were needed for keeping at bay the German and Italian bombers. I have no doubt they have made up for this since.

The service proceeded with no untoward incident. It was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and at the elevation of the Host for the blessing there was another outburst of fireworks. During vespers my attention had been often distracted by the carved capital of a pillar directly opposite. It had been fashioned into the head of a cherub, but a cherub such as I have never met before or since, and looking strangely out of place in this exotic setting: a typically Scottish boy of anything between seven and twelve years of age, with sandy hair, blue eyes and a slightly crooked, strangely sardonic half-smile as, chin resting on crossed hands, he stared straight across at me, seeming to say: 'And what are you doing here?' He might have drifted straight in from the Gorbals, and I could not help wondering what strange freak of parenthood or turn

of karma had brought him to a back street of Bombay. As I write I can still see his quizzical, crooked, but not unfriendly, half-smile.

My deeper concern on this occasion was its evaluation as a form of public worship: to what extent did this service fill the needs of this Indian people for a visible, corporate manifestation of their religion, a public act of worship? It happened that only a few hours previously I had, on my way to the bank to arrange for foreign currency for my journey, noticed, standing apart in a secluded little island in the middle of the business centre of Bombay, a very English-looking church, which on closer investigation was seen to be the 'Anglican Cathedral of St. Thomas'. It is a simple, dignified building: stone with a facing of cream over nave and tower, and an unfaced stone, buttressed apse. Surrounding it, within iron railings, is a patch of well-kept lawn with flower-beds, while potted plants and shrubs are massed up against the walls. As is usual with such churches the interior was too cluttered up with sepulchral monuments and tablets; except for this it was pleasing: simple and in good taste. The altar, with its hangings in correct liturgical colours, was a simple marble table with cross and six candles, standing well out in the centre of the apse; the choir stalls ranged on either side in front of it. It was clear that both interior and exterior were tended with loving care.

Honesty compels me to place it on record here that it has been my constant experience both at home and abroad to find Anglican churches built and furnished in immeasurably better taste, and also cleaner and better cared for, than Catholic churches in the same district. Now, admittedly it is easier to keep clean, attractive and tidy a church that is used by a limited number of people hardly more than one day a week than one that is thronged every day and has besides a continual stream of visitors for private devotions. But that does not explain it all. In the matter of church buildings, furnishing, vestments, pictures, statues and the like it has always been a matter of amazement to me that nature should be so prodigal of a positive genius for the ugly, the tawdry, the garish and the second-rate; for surely no merely negative lack of taste or mere thoughtless choice of materials could possibly produce the hideousness to be found in the vast majority of our Catholic

churches. Speaking generally—there are honourable exceptions—Indian Catholic churches more than most seem to have absorbed from the West all that is ugliest and in the worst taste in church art.

This is spoken of the external setting; the same remarks apply to the external form of the services for which the buildings with their trappings exist. The Anglican cathedral was so peaceful, clean and tastefully ordered that I at once felt at harmony with it. In the cool, dim interior the noise of the busy city was hushed to a low murmur like that of waves breaking on a distant shore. I sank gratefully into a seat and, after a pause to collect and calm my faculties, took out my breviary and recited vespers. By a strange irony it was (in my Benedictine calendar) vespers of three martyr abbots with their companions of that ancient English Benedictine Congregation of which I am the least of the monks. They had been put to death for refusing to accept the establishment of this same Anglican Church with the king as its supreme head as a church distinct, separate from and independent of the one universal, Catholic Church of Christendom. Of these, Richard, Abbot of Glastonbury, was, after imprisonment in the Tower, dragged to the top of the tor overlooking his monastery, and there hanged, drawn and quartered. Abbot Hugh of Reading was put to death on the same day at the gate of his monastery; and shortly after John, Abbot of Colchester, suffered a similar fate. Yet it was not, after all, so incongruous that I should feel more at home in this church of the sect that had slaughtered my monastic forefathers than in the average Catholic church of the district. It was no more 'European' in style than the numerous Catholic churches of the city, and as for the services held in it, these conformed far more closely in externals to the official public worship of the Catholic Church than most of the services held in Catholic churches. Further, it has been my experience that these Anglican services are frequently performed in a much more solemn and dignified manner than are the majority of Catholic services.

The official Prayer Book services of Matins, Holy Eucharist and Evensong are simply adapted vernacular forms of the old Catholic liturgy which is still the official worship of the Catholic Church; yet while this has persisted in the Church of England,

with at least the possibility of full participation by the laity, in the Catholic Church this has given place, in the case of matins and evensong, to 'popular devotions', while the Holy Eucharist had become, until recent attempts at reform, something at which the laity were silent spectators. So evensong, the vespers which I recited there alone, was in fact the normal evening service still in this and similar Anglican churches, and to me, with my Benedictine formation, much more congenial as a form of prayer than the 'popular' devotions of Catholic churches which I attended under duress and escaped from as quickly as possible. Again the setting of these services and the manner of their performance, owing much to the age-long association of Benedictines with the English Church from its foundation, made a natural appeal to me. But apart altogether from this consideration, it is undeniable that such a church provided a much more worthy setting for divine worship than most of the Catholic churches of the country.

Inevitably, however, in the circumstances I was compelled to compare and contrast the typical service of this Anglican church as regards the external trappings, building, furnishing, dress and manner of celebration, with the Goanese service I attended the same evening. The celebration in this Goanese church was only a special, occasional celebration, in which, however, it was recognized that vespers (the Anglican evensong) was the correct Catholic service for the occasion. One wondered what the effect would have been if this vast assembly, instead of being mute spectators, had raised their voices in unison in a joyful melody to the Lord in a service of vernacular psalms, and readings from the Scriptures and from hagiography extolling the saint's life and work. Such vernacular psalmody is the norm in the Anglican Church; even if the congregation does not always in fact join in the chant, there is always the possibility and opportunity, and in many places this is used to the full.

I have said that the simplicity, dignity and restraint of the setting and performance of the typical Anglican service does appeal more to my English and Benedictine temperament; but there can be no doubt that the more exuberant, flamboyant, colourful, less restrained Indian celebration with its lights, string music, incense, processions, jostling and surging crowds

is a more valid expression of the Indian spirit, if only a little of the bad western importations could be replaced by good honest Indian. If it really was necessary four hundred years ago to press Indians into a European mould, then perhaps the Portuguese presentation of the Faith did conform more closely than others to India's own instinct.

I should not like to be misunderstood here. The liturgical renewal in the Catholic Church, intended among other aims to encourage the laity to a deeper understanding of and fuller participation in the Church's liturgical worship, has so far made little progress in India. It must be the starting-point of any deepening of the spiritual life of Indian Catholics and of any extension of the Church in India, but the external expression of this will have to be Indian; and the typically Indian expression, requiring a little touching up and polishing combined with a very much deeper understanding of what it is all about, is to be gauged from the form it has taken in such celebrations as that which I attended. A rite such as the Syro-Malankara, which I knew in Kerala, is undoubtedly better suited to the Indian spirit. I was enchanted, when arriving late on one occasion and instead of going up into the sanctuary remaining in the nave, to notice how a group of little urchins immediately in front of me shouted out the vernacular responses in alternation with the archbishop who was celebrating. Unfortunately it is also clear that, given the rivalry and jealousy between Latins and Orientals, any suggestion that this rite should be extended to the whole of India would raise a regular tornado around the head of the unfortunate who proposed it.

I have dwelt on this visit to the Goanese church at some length because it illustrates well what I was looking for in these cities of India: the point at which the spiritual and unseen pass into the material and visible and become, as it were, incarnated; and to what extent the material as we find it in such cases is a valid expression and incarnation of the spiritual. Bombay or Calcutta: one big cosmopolitan city is much the same as any other. As a Christian monk I knew that I should find the essentially authentic incarnation of the spiritual in the rites of the Catholic churches of Bombay, however uncongenial the accidental expression might be; in the non-Christian rites I

should find broken, isolated fragments of this, but possibly in an external setting and presentation more impressive and congenial to the Indian mentality. It was precisely in such externals that I was prepared to find the greater divergence, while, as the source was approached, I expected to find the lines converge more and more to a single unity. The sacraments of the Catholic Church, as presented in the scheme of the Pseudo-Denys, are the complete and perfect expression in material form of all reality, literally, therefore, the centre or 'pivot' of the universe. Through union, 'becoming one', with God through the sacraments man is capable of including within himself as a whole the whole universe which on the material plane he grasps only piecemeal. It offers the complete realization of all that the Hindu philosophers have been seeking.

The psalms and other parts of Christian sacred Scripture which form the matins and evensong we have been discussing, and are the still more intimate veil within which the central mystery or sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is presented and received, are the language of God, and so the language of man as he ought to be. They are the verbal expression and further elucidation of what he receives in the sacraments, designed to further his spiritual formation: many words which help to assimilate him to the One Word. Analogous to the manner in which the hand of a child is guided in learning to write, or skills in music, painting, athletics are acquired, so by repetition of the words of Scripture and in their translation further into the material world, in action, man is moulding himself according to his true image which is the image of God: he speaks the language of God in every sense of the phrase and proportionately his life becomes the life of God. One school of Hindu thought believes that if one contemplates steadily the statue or eikon of a deity, after it has received a special consecration, the deity represented (or, the idea seems to be, literally *made present* under this form) takes possession of the devotee so that the two become identified. This is a striking adumbration of what takes place in the Christian contemplation, which is active participation in the Church's liturgical worship wherein man contemplates God with an increasingly clear gaze which is at the same time his own increasing transformation into God, his

'deification', in the language of the Greek Fathers. He is literally 'conformed' to God.[1]

There is no single material phenomenon that is not a valid manifestation of God, so far as it goes, but it is only as man approaches to unity through the sacraments that these are seen to fall into their proper place and appreciated at their true value, and in fact receive a measure of reality which they do not possess except in as far as they are united, made one, with their source: and man possesses them only in proportion as he moves away from their material form and expression.

The big city, then, the Bombay, Calcutta, London, Paris, New York, what you will, is the point at which the stream of reality is so far removed from its source, becomes so attenuated, as to be in danger of being no longer recognized for what it is, leading men on to pursue an illusion.

I was prepared to find a true yogi anywhere, but I was not expressly searching for one in a big city such as Bombay (which is not the same as saying that I did not think there was one to be found there). Nor did I look for the purest form of Hindu or Buddhist religious worship there. I expected to find its truest expression nearer the source, and to find a true yogi more easily among those who had withdrawn from the peripheral material phenomena, in so far as that is consistent with life on this earth, to a life professedly aimed at 'realization', union with God, the perfection of religious observance. Accordingly I set off the following morning to Banaras, the first stage of my journey to the source of Hindu religion, where I hoped especially to see popular religion in its most fervent expression. I was travelling inwards, from the externals to the interior, upstream towards the source, from the manifold to the simple, from appearance to reality.

[1] Cf. St. Paul's (2 *Cor.* iii. 18): 'We all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord.' This should be compared with the 'sheaths' and 'planes' of yoga (p. 51) and with the yogic doctrine of the *mantras* (p. 251). Cf. also 1 *Cor.* xiii, 12: 'Then I shall know even as I am known.' The idea seems to be that I *am* God's thought of me. God *is* his knowledge of himself (*intellectio sui ipsius* in the scholastic phrase) and I am his knowledge of me, his knowledge of himself in this limited expression, a temporal and spatial extension of the eternal. Cf. also *Gal.* iv. 9: '. . . after you have known God, or rather are known by God.'

KASHI: 'CITY OF LIGHT'

In India one ought not to be surprised, on asking for a ticket for Banaras, to be given one for Varanasi, and to be told that one must travel there by the *Kashi Express*. One remembering his Hindu philosophy should be prepared to find that the apparent difference of name is in fact maya, illusion: really they are all one and the same. I shall explain.

'Behold, I make all things new!' The desire to make a fresh start with the acquiring of independence has led to a new coinage, new weights and measures and, in some cases, to a changing of names of places and streets. Varanasi seems a more suitable name for the city which is bounded on north and south by the two small streams Varuna and Assi respectively: so it has now been renamed Varanasi. Perhaps it is not so much a re-naming as a correction, since it is obvious that Banaras is, by a common linguistic change, simply a corruption of Varanasi (Baranasi). It is not quite so clear why one should hope to reach Banaras (Varanasi) by taking a train for Kashi (Kasi), 'The City of Light'. It appears that Kashi is an ancient name for Banaras; more accurately Kashi was the ancient city around which the present Banaras has grown up. It is said to have been founded by Kashya round about 1200 B.C. and to have taken its name from him. In the sixth century B.C. it was certainly the name of a flourishing state of which this was the capital. Under the Mogul emperors it bore still another name: but we shall not enter into that.

Nor should the hopeful traveller be too trustful of the title 'Express'; Indian trains are in fact a rather leisurely mode of travel. On the other hand they are cheap. First-class travel costs roughly the same as second in England; second-class is about two-thirds the cost of first, and third about half second-class. There is on some routes a kind of super first-class called 'air-conditioned class' at a considerably higher fare, and recently a few third-class air-conditioned trains have been introduced. Europeans nearly always travel first or air-conditioned class, but I could never afford either of these.

Sleeping accommodation, except in first-class or air-conditioned, is practically unobtainable, but all trains have exceptionally big luggage-racks which traditionally are used as

beds: and all Indians carry bedding with them when travelling. It is by general custom admitted that the first arrivals have the right to stake out a claim by unrolling their beds for the night on these racks, and many a night have I passed perched on one of them. I never knew if these fittings were expressly designed to serve the dual purpose of luggage-racks and sleeping-berths, or whether they were made to serve this latter purpose by man's innate tendency to make the best of things. Both guards and passengers seemed to take it for granted.

Luggage is not considered a problem. No one thinks of putting it in the luggage-van. It is piled wherever there may seem to be a vacant place, and one may sit on it, sleep on it, or practise mountaineering by climbing over it to reach the door. Passengers may travel on the footboards; doors are commonly left open. Trains start off with a considerable proportion of the passengers still consuming strange meats at the food stalls or performing their ablutions at the water-taps: but I never saw one left behind. Washing, and even a minor bath, at the station fountains is very common. I myself have washed and shaved there in preference to the stench of the toilet on the train, and after a rough calculation of the number of different skin diseases that could be lying latent in each square centimetre of the washing apparatus. Hawkers may work their way along the footboards while the train is lurching along, with an astounding range of mineral-waters, fruit, portable meals, cigarettes, handwork. Beggars and shoe-cleaners compete for custom.

Travel by train is not for us of the lower class a comfortable method of proceeding from one point to another, but if one regards it as a kind of mobile camping-out and is prepared to take what comes, it is not all that bad; and the patience and friendliness of one's fellow-travellers—and courtesy too, once the battle for a place has been decided—is always a rewarding experience.

My journey from Bombay to Banaras took from 6.30 a.m. to 11.15 a.m. of the following day. This was one of the fastest of Indian trains. The journey during the day followed the usual course of such journeys. I have no clear recollection of the night. I had secured for myself a place on the rack on which to spread out my bed. I was glad to get inside my sleeping-bag instead of sleeping on top, for on the plains at this season the

nights can be very chilly; and I slept remarkably well, allowing for the arrival and departure of passengers at intermediate stations.

I regained full consciousness at about 6.30 in the morning, emerging into a cold, grey world and that nadir of morale that most people experience after a night on a train, to find what seemed to be a deep philosophical or theological discussion going on beneath me. Three young men squatted cross-legged on the seats, one of them, whom I took to be a sadhu, being a thin, emaciated, ascetic-looking young man with an intellectual face and dark burning eyes, who probably had tuberculosis. He was swathed in an ample, thin woollen shawl or toga-like garment such as men do sometimes wear in winter in this district.

The three must have entered the train some time after 1.30 a.m., for I had not noticed them when I awoke about that time. Refreshed somewhat after a rather unsatisfactory wash and shave I returned to find them still in animated conversation. It was not easy to follow the drift of what they said but I was impressed by the spectacle of these young men, journeying towards the Holy City and engaged, as I supposed, in speculation on matters of high theology or mystic experience. The thought had occurred to me that I might be nearing the end of my quest almost before I had begun. I bought myself a cup of tea from one of the men who meet trains armed with an aluminium kettle of tea in one hand and in the other a bucket filled with cups. Tea and milk are usually safe since they have been boiled (probably more than once), but I never felt sure of the cups and carried a bakelite mug around for such occasions.

The conversation went on and on, but from the now frequent lapses into English it gradually became evident that they were discussing not mystical theology but the law of India as relating to insurance, and particularly to fire insurance. My illusions were finally dispelled when, breakfast being now available, they ordered to be brought in to them a very large meal which included, I remember, lamb cutlets and eggs such as no sadhu, or even orthodox Hindu, would permit himself, at least in public. They were apparently undergraduates who had just taken, or were just about to take, examinations, and their

conversation had been about the subject of their examination. At Banaras they stepped from the train in western dress of shirt and tie, jacket and trousers.

Meanwhile there had entered the train at Allahabad a young man whom I took to be an American, though I was surprised to see him travelling second-class. We exchanged that furtive glance that Europeans do exchange in such circumstances. (In India all white people, including Americans, are 'Europeans'.) I was not looking at all clerical, having removed my white habit in order to keep it clean for the end of the journey, and I expect he too was wondering what I was doing in a second-class compartment. I for my part assumed that he was probably either a journalist looking for local colour or just a young man of limited means travelling for experience, for after consuming a guava (they grow readily on this central plain and are reputed to be good for the digestion) he whipped out a large note-book and proceeded to write, with occasional pauses for reflection. Later we got into conversation and I found that he was indeed an American. The incident is impressed on my mind because by an unusual coincidence I met him again almost exactly a month later waiting for a train on the station at New Delhi, and the day after returning to Bombay came face to face with him in the city near the U.S.A. Information Bureau.

But mention of him reminds me that much more obtrusive on the Indian scene than Americans are the evidences of American charity in the form of gifts of foodstuffs, especially of dried milk. This latter arrives in large tins, about ten inches high and six in diameter, marked: 'A Gift From the People of the U.S.A. Not To Be Sold or Exchanged.' But what one sees more often in a country where everything has a value is the empty tins adapted to the most diverse purposes, most commonly as (liquid) milk-cans or as tiffin boxes, with small hasps soldered on, sometimes complete with lock and key. But I saw one in a church in the north used as a stand for a lamp, placed before the Holy Child in a crib at Christmas, still marked conspicuously: 'A Gift From the People of the U.S.A.' On my way home to England the first sight that met my eyes on landing at Suez, in the chilly dusk of a winter evening, was further empty tins, this time flattened out and used to fill empty window

spaces in dockyard buildings. There were still a number of half-submerged wrecks in the harbour and I did not ask how the windows got broken.

Such charity has rarely been better bestowed, and I believe that in India it does usually reach its right destination; but inevitably there were cases where it went astray, and dried milk, for example, was in fact sometimes both sold and exchanged. I occasionally had to buy dried milk for my community and it was necessary to make very careful enquiries concerning the source of the milk one was buying. I have been offered at the regular market price a whole case of this American dried milk (six tins to a case) with apparently no consciousness on the part of the salesman that he was doing anything at all irregular. This may not be quite as bad as it seems. I found that people sometimes saved up the amounts they received and then exchanged them in the bazaar for something they found more useful. This happened with small amounts. It is more difficult to understand how a whole case could come on to the market, except possibly from a charitable institution which received a large allocation. Anyhow it obviously opened a path to an endless vista of shady dealing. I sometimes wondered if the peasants believed this was milk at all; some of them did not know how to mix or reconstitute it, and of those who did some could not be bothered.

At the time of my journey the Chinese infiltration over the Himalayas into Indian territory was one of the principal topics in the daily newspapers, and it was significant that the maps of the railway routes usually displayed in all carriages had been removed. Some of my Indian friends had been a little worried on hearing of my expedition and had warned me that if I went too near the frontier I might be taken for a spy by one side or the other. In fact I had no such difficulty, and on this stretch of my journey I was only asked by fellow-passengers, with all the Indian determination to get to the bottom of such things, whether I was: (1) A Buddhist; (2) A Bishop. The impossibility of procuring a map of the district—and I continued to try—did present a difficulty, since I have learned to rely on maps and should not be able to speak the local language in order to enquire my way.

At the exit of Banaras Cantonment Station, where I alighted,

there was the usual surge of taxi and rickshaw drivers—usual, that is, in the smaller towns, for there are times in the larger cities such as Bombay when one may have to queue for a taxi. A European is the primary target since it is always assumed that (a) He will have more money than the average Indian; (b) He is less likely to know the correct fare. I asked the most pressing of the taxi drivers how much he wanted to drive me to the Catholic church. The demand was for three rupees (about 4*s.* 6*d.*). Although I had not the remotest idea of the distance to the church, I rejected this with a great show of indignation. Several offers at two and a half rupees I also turned down, and finally chose a cycle-rickshaw man who offered to take me for 'fifty naie paise' (about ninepence). This included the carriage of a heavy valise. The following morning I was accosted by the same drivers with offers to carry me at a very reduced fee; but I wanted to walk, though in India they never believe that anyone can really prefer to walk.

The journey from the station to the church proved to be only about half a mile by a short cut over hard-baked ground that had obviously been at one time an army parade-ground, since this was the army cantonment area. I do not wish to labour this point any further, but I must in honesty record that the church to which I was being drawn, after skirting a ditch, a small hump-backed bridge, and arriving with a jolt on the tarred road, looked so neat, dignified and tasteful, showed such marks of careful maintenance, and was in general so attractive in its surround of green turf and brilliant flowering shrubs beneath a deep-blue sky that I was about to nudge my driver and ask if he was sure that he was taking me to the right place. Then I saw it labelled plainly 'Catholic Church' (or it may have been 'Catholic Chaplaincy'). The French–Canadian Capuchin Fathers who were my hosts were in fact rather apologetic about the building, explaining that it was only a makeshift converted from something else. However, makeshift or not, it was the most attractive small church I had so far met.

As I have said, I began my quest at Banaras because it is pre-eminently the sacred city of the Hindus, the most celebrated of all places of pilgrimage, and I hoped to be able to observe here Hinduism in its most intense popular form and to

gain some idea of what to expect as I progressed up from the visible to the invisible, up to the spiritual source from its material manifestation.

I had already seen innumerable scattered isolated instances of this: the stick of incense burned in the cab of a milk truck, the little garland of flowers laid before a wayside shrine; the well-dressed woman in a Poona street removing her shoes and standing in prayer before the shrine that blocked most effectively the middle of the road, while her husband, in smart European dress, stood by patiently waiting; the couple of farthings put into the temple offertory box by a poor peasant woman in Kerala on her way back from the market, an overall journey of ten or twelve miles or more, with her head-load of brushes or banana leaves or what not, for which she had perhaps received a rupee or so; their faith in the medicine of a monk of a different faith; not least their touching patience and unfailing cheerfulness in grinding poverty and sickness. I hoped to study here, concentrated in this centre, the faith that sustained it all, before following it to its source. I envisaged the ordinary devout Indian as concerned more particularly about the circumference of his religion, the outward observance, without understanding very much of what lay beneath it. It was in the hills rather that I hoped to meet one who had, in the phrase of the Pseudo-Denys, 'penetrated beyond the signs'. Still I might possibly find a true yogi here before I even reached the Himalayas. So I went searching through the bazaars, the alleys and the byways.

'I HOLY MAN'

My first expedition into the city was taken with no more definite object than to become acquainted with the geography of the place and receive general impressions, prepared to take whatever was coming to me, or, in a more Christian phraseology, receptive to whatever the Lord might send me. As I have said, I take this as a cardinal principle in any action. The first thing the Lord sent me on this occasion was a man dressed in the faded saffron robes of a sadhu, who, with a calculating stare and look of appraisal, announced: 'I holy man,' and offered to guide me to 'The Golden Temple': 'Then you can

give me a gift.' May I be forgiven if I misjudged him, but I did not like the look of him; and I felt that he was not all that holy either. In any case I had not got my bearings and felt that I was not yet in the right mood or disposition to profit from a sight of even a Golden Temple. So I thanked him, saying that I did not wish to see the Golden Temple then; perhaps I might come to see it later, another day. It is always a mistake to say too much, yet we nearly always do it instead of leaving well alone. This last addition was my undoing.

When he accosted me I was examining, in the bazaar between this temple and the bathing-ghats on the Ganges, some small bowls, carved from alabaster and other stones, varying in price from the equivalent of threepence upwards: a beautifully-veined blood-red and grey alabaster bowl six inches in diameter cost about two shillings. A couple of days later I met him again, not far from this same spot, in a narrow, crowded, winding bazaar when I was actually on my way to the Golden Temple. He obviously regarded me this time as his private property, but I have always found it unbearingly irritating to have someone trailing along by my side on an expedition of this kind, for ever pointing out to me the things he thinks I ought to notice, instead of letting me take it in and then ask any questions I find necessary; so I thanked him again and explained as nicely as I could that I would rather wander up alone. This evoked a most un-sadhu-like exhibition of mingled indignation and contempt. He may have been a true yogi, and perhaps I missed my chance; but I doubt it.

It was in this same area, a maze of narrow twisting lanes, lined with small open-fronted shops selling everything imaginable, winding up and converging on the Golden Temple, that I was pursued for a full half-hour by a man with a knife—not inspired by any homicidal notions: he only wanted to sell it. I had cast merely the most fleeting, sidelong glance at it in passing, for it was the kind of knife, with about ten blades, for which the average small boy would sell his soul, and I count several such small boys among my acquaintance; but this glance was enough. It was thrust at me and ten rupees (about 15*s*.) demanded as the price. By the time he finally gave up the chase the price had fallen to two rupees. Had it been reasonably good steel I might have bought it at this price, but to stop and

test it would have been to expose myself to the possibility of further pursuit and my nerve was not equal to it.

One cannot take for granted that 'steel' in India is what is commonly called steel elsewhere. I have bought table knives from a big store, made in India but stamped 'Sheffield Steel', presumably on the same principle by which 'Scotch' need not have been distilled in Scotland, and if one bent the blades they remained bent. This is, in fact, only one aspect of a wider issue in a rapidly developing industrialization. One may buy tools and brushes, for instance, stamped conspicuously 'Made in England' (or 'in U.S.A.'), or 'British Made', but if one examines them a little more closely it is just possible to discern a small, a very small, 'as'—'as Made in England', etc. Sometimes, as I have said, this gesture to the conventions is omitted.

Thinking of knives, I did later buy for the equivalent of four-pence or so (and no bargaining) from a man perched on the footboard of a moving train, a hand-made folding knife of excellent tough steel, with razor-edge and a murderous-looking point. In fact, looking at it again when I eventually arrived home, noticing its point and how like a dagger it looked, and considering the unpredictable nature of the small boy I had in mind when I bought it, I thought: Well, no; perhaps on the whole, not. So I still have it. I too have experienced homicidal urges—but there.

It was in this same maze of narrow bazaars leading up to the temple that on another occasion I found myself without warning hurled roughly to one side almost into one of the open booths and turned round wondering if this was one of the occasions when one could reasonably be expected to turn the other cheek. It was only a cow, swinging her leisurely course with full assurance of a right of way which in fact she always enjoys, that had caught me with her huge rump. Standing in the middle of a railway track or an arterial road she may be coaxed or encouraged to move, but on no account may she be driven or beaten—not, at least, if anyone is looking. Mr. Nehru incurred considerable opprobrium a few years ago by refusing to worship one.

I know that all this has no direct concern with the search for a yogi, but it helps in visualizing the world in which your yogi has to develop, and the kind of experience he must pass through

in his quest for the higher spirituality, just as this was my experience in trailing a true yogi. No one may escape it. The more urgent the search, the more intense the experience, all the more significant does each apparently casual encounter tend to become.

TEMPLES

The 'Golden Temple' is golden in the sense that the dome and the essentially Indian type of spire or lantern—I can think of no other word to describe it—rising over the central shrine, to which the rest of the building is an appendage, is plated with gold. The present building is comparatively modern, but there has existed a Hindu temple here from a very early period, periodically destroyed or converted into a mosque by Moslem conquerors. Few things have been left unsaid about the British since independence, but I have yet to hear it said that they made a habit of destroying temples or of converting them into Anglican churches. This Golden Temple, the Temple of Visvanatha, standing in the heart of the city and quite close to the bathing-ghats, is considered to be one of the sights of Banaras, and it is assumed that all tourists will want to see it. To 'see it' means, of course, to see the outside of it, for Europeans are normally excluded from Hindu temples. There are a few which Europeans may enter; also exceptions are sometimes made. Recent legislation has made it illegal to exclude Indian *harijans* or 'untouchables' from the temple, but in many places they exercise this right at risk of their lives and there are occasional riots when they insist on this legal right. Shortly before I left India there was considerable unpleasantness, as reported in the Indian press, over the case of an 'untouchable' governor of a state who, on the occasion of an official, formal visit to a temple, considered that he had not been treated with proper courtesy by the officiating priest, and attributed this to discrimination on the grounds of his 'untouchability'. The exact point seems to have been the allegation that the ceremonial garland had been thrown on (in order to avoid touching him) instead of being placed on.

In the case of the Golden Temple I was, fortunately, able to see in through the open door and to observe the people at their

devotions—a constant stream of people of all ages, both sexes and, judging by their dress, varying degrees of wealth. The ritual seemed to include sprinkling with holy water the figures carved over the entrance, one of them, if I remember rightly, being Ganesh, the god with an elephant's trunk in place of a nose.

I stood there for some time, trying to absorb the spirit and atmosphere of all this. No one seemed to mind; I received no black looks; indeed what positive reaction I was able to discern suggested that they viewed my interest favourably. Perhaps they thought I too wanted to say my prayers and had just approached as near as I dared; or perhaps my monastic habit made a difference. I had often wondered how Hindus were able to distinguish between the castes and 'untouchables', especially if these latter were well-dressed, as they sometimes may be, and how in practice it was possible to know who should be excluded from the temple. I asked one or two of my Indian friends. They all told me that an Indian could distinguish an 'untouchable' immediately and was rarely mistaken; that in fact they could tell with a high degree of accuracy a man's caste from his appearance. If an 'untouchable' had been abroad for a number of years it might be more difficult, but even then they were not often mistaken.

When travelling abroad I have always been struck more by the essential sameness of people than by their accidental differences. Perhaps it is that one gets an exaggerated idea of the strangeness of foreign countries and people because books and pictures not unnaturally tend to stress the differences. Most people seem to find India one of the most 'different' of all countries, and its religion, or religions, especially bewildering. On the surface it is certainly all very strange and mysterious, but perhaps not stranger than our own religion appears to the Hindu. Elephant-trunk-nosed gods, gods with many arms and several heads, animal worship, are not after all, on the face of it, so very much stranger than some of our own church symbolism. God in our sacred scripture is described metaphorically by a great variety of animals, deliberately, so the Pseudo-Denys thinks, as *unlike* as possible so that there should be no danger of taking them literally. In India in fact, at least among the less educated, such are taken literally; but even that is partly

compensated by the underlying assumption that all material forms are only symbolic, illusion. Anyway, on the surface. . . .

I have before me at the moment, as illustration to a German theological essay, a reproduction of a manuscript illustration of the twelfth century, showing the 'Lamb of God' on an impossibly high and steep curly mountain, standing with a staff and cross held in one paw sloped over one shoulder. I confess that such illustrations seem to me slightly blasphemous, but they are entrenched in our tradition and the fruit of deep devotion. I wonder what a Hindu with no knowledge at all of Christianity would make of it. The Lamb, by the way, is being adored by the saints (it is, of course, illustrating the Apocalypse); the original is in the John Rylands Library, Manchester. On a plane above the mountain stand the four evangelists, still stranger figures if one knows nothing of the symbolism: winged human figures, with the head of a man, lion, bull, eagle respectively. One could, of course, multiply such instances of sacred symbolism to which we have become accustomed but others possibly would find more than a little odd: the fish, for instance, as the very early symbol of Christ.

Closing one's eyes to the comparative strangeness of the externals in such matters, one found the basic behaviour of these devotees very similar to that of Catholics in general and more particularly to that of their Catholic fellow-countrymen, and indeed of eastern Catholics in general. One very small, characteristic action, common to both Catholics and non-Christians in India, which I noticed also in Egypt, and I think in Greece but have not seen elsewhere in Europe, was the touching of a sacred object, a statue for instance, with the finger-tips, then the raising of the fingers to the lips. I had noticed this first in our little chapel at Purandhar when a party of Indian schoolgirls, mostly non-Christian, were looking round and there was great competition to stretch over and touch the crucifix in this way. I said I had not seen it in Europe, but in fact in Benedictine communities, that still have their roots in the period before separation of Eastern and Western Church and retain some customs from this time, it is sometimes done by officials taking an oath before a crucifix before assuming office. There is a regular rubric for it.

The moving round the temple from one shrine to another has

its exact counterpart in the visits, by eastern Christians especially, to the shrines of their favourite saints, with here a candle, there a prayer, and here again, at least in India, a little garland of flowers. Place a statue of Christ, St. Antony or another of the saints, midway between Shiva, Vishnu, Parvati and the rest, and the perambulations would continue, with Christ receiving as much honour as (and no more than) the others. I have already mentioned that Indian 'gods' correspond rather to our 'saints', as limited incarnations of God spelt with a capital, and frequently throwing into prominence one particular divine attribute. There is no need to go to the Christian East, however, to see a parallel to this progress from altar to altar and shrine to shrine, marking a spontaneous devotion that calls for a material and physical expression. It has often been noted by visitors as a practice of Benedictine monks, than whom, as a class, none could be more conservative, traditional and less carried away by popular devotions, that after compline, the last choir office of the day before retiring, they will tend to go on a little round of visits to altars and shrines in the church before leaving it, each with his peculiar preferences and attachments.

Even the grubbiness, untidiness, deplorable taste and general clutter of so many of our Catholic churches we find duplicated in the Hindu temple. In this matter of standards of art, taste can of course be cultivated; but in the meantime we must not lose our sense of proportion. What one may find positively painful and obliged to pass with averted eyes and a faint shudder, another may experience as a perfect vision of beauty and an immense aid to devotion. I am reminded of an incident related to me by a member of a Benedictine community in England with a large school. Boys passing a certain statue of Our Lady, of the so-called 'repository style', not positively bad but by no means great art, invariably stopped to ask her intercession. When this statue, in an attempt to improve their taste, was replaced by a good original work, contemporary in treatment but not offensive to pious eyes, the boys by common consent ignored it. After a time it was taken away and the original statue reinstated, whereupon the boys resumed their devotions.

An outstanding exception to the general sordidness of so many Hindu temples is the new temple on the 1,000 acre

campus of Banaras Hindu University. This magnificent, beautifully proportioned building of marble, spotlessly clean and well-kept, is, in accordance with official policy, open to all, so that I was able, after removing my shoes, to wander round at leisure and examine it. A Hindu temple is not, as a Christian church is, intended for congregational worship. It is primarily a great shrine, enclosing some sacred object, a statue or a symbol, surrounded by lesser shrines and approached through a series of courts converging on this central shrine. Over this rises the massive tower or spire-like erection which is the most characteristic feature of Indian temple architecture.[1] On the occasion of great pilgrimages, the pilgrims may surge and throng through these courts, or group outside, but essentially the whole is designed as a setting for the object in the central shrine, with accommodation for individual devotion. The thousands of small shrines scattered throughout the land present this central feature without the surrounding courts. There may possibly be a certain analogy to this, though it must not be pressed too far, in the remains of ancient Celtic churches in Scotland and Ireland. These are often far too small to have accommodated more than a tiny fraction of the potential congregation that lived near them. In the Christian conception a church building is primarily an altar; the rest of the building is an extension of this, a shelter for the people who group round it, as they for their part are mystically an extension of the altar and of the mystery enacted on it. Were these tiny churches conceived primarily as shelters for the altar and the priest who officiated at it, while the people stood outside looking in at the open door, as they still do in other parts of Europe outside small, and even not so small, churches?

[1] A fine example of this can be seen in the twelfth-century Temple of Juggernaut on pl. 11. In fact, however, since the buildings and precincts of the larger temples may cover as much as 25 acres, the most conspicuous sight for the European who is not allowed inside the precincts may often be the *gopura*, the great tower at their entrance, most commonly a massive pyramidal structure rising in steps. There may be several of such round the enclosure. A possible connection has been suggested (Dom Theodore Bogler, *Laacher Heft* xxv, 1959, p. 107) between the step-ladder effect of this structure and Jacob's Ladder of the Old Testament, linking heaven and earth and foreshadowing the Christian altar (perhaps also with the Tower of Babel?). Cf. also note on p. 130.

Since Hindu religion from the beginning seems to have depended rather on the performance of certain traditional ritual actions than belief in and transmission of a universally accepted body of doctrine, there seems to be little organized religious teaching, and consequently no need of a building able to accommodate a large body of people for instruction. Occasional sermons can be held in the open at time of pilgrimage—the dry season. It is always possible to approach a pandit or guru in certain centres for individual instruction. There is a house of such teachers near, and I understand associated with, the Golden Temple in Banaras. I did on occasion see a sadhu or priest in the characteristic saffron robes on the banks of the Ganges teaching and explaining to a small group of people squatting on the ground around him the epic of Ram. He would give a little explanation of a verse or two; they would sing it; he would continue his talk. It was rather like a 'catechism class' or a group of Moslem boys learning the Koran. If one wants to go the whole way, then one attaches oneself to a guru or master, whom one obeys implicitly, and who, for his part, accepts responsibility for one's salvation and one's sins. If his doctrine should appear diametrically opposed to that of another guru, of what importance is that, when all is illusion and all truth relative?

The object venerated in the central shrine, for the sake of which the whole fabric exists, is most commonly a phallic symbol, usually both the male and female generative organs. It should, however, be said that unless one knew this beforehand one is not likely to learn it from the symbols themselves; they are not at all realistic. I have sometimes speculated on the possible psychological effect of the ubiquity of this phallic symbol (it is the most common object of the innumerable small wayside shrines). I doubt if it has as bad an effect as the suggestive pictures that appear in advertisements and periodicals in the West, which seem designed with the express object of arousing the passions. The gross sexuality of some temple sculpture is undeniable, and it would be altogether too ingenuous to pretend to see in it only a high mystic symbolism; still it is not so much in evidence as one is sometimes led to suppose, and it may even be necessary to look closely in order to find it.

Perhaps the most striking factor about this temple was the fact that the number of people, other than obvious sightseers, frequenting it was in inverse proportion to the standard of its architecture, cleanliness, and maintenance. It would, however, be unfair to suggest that potential devotees might have been put off by these very qualities; it is much less easily accessible than the city churches, at a distance from the city centre, and isolated on this very large campus. It also lacks the tradition of the older temples; the traditional exercises for a pilgrim to Banaras, for instance, include bathing in the Ganges and a visit to the Golden Temple.

Another temple that tourists are always expected to want to visit is the Durga Temple, more often referred to as the 'Monkey Temple' since these creatures swarm all over it and are actively encouraged to prolong their residence. This is on good lines, with some intricate carved ornamentations, but on the whole a rather modest building. It is less built-up than the Golden Temple, but its good points were for me obscured by the general squalor and grime of its surroundings and fabric. I am speaking of what I could see from the outer court. There is a large tank or pool attached, but the mere thought of coming into personal contact with its water sent a shiver down my spine. Moreover the monkeys, whom I usually find rather attractive creatures in their native haunts, here seemed only repulsive. Again I speak as a European, and perhaps a rather over-fastidious one at that. There was a notice displayed in English saying that non-Hindus were not allowed to enter the temple, and I could not see much through the door. There were scarcely any people entering or leaving it.

Apart from the one on the university campus the temples of Banaras are unimpressive, bearing no comparison with famous ones such as that at Madurai, and one experiences a certain sense of disillusionment in consequence. This does in fact seem to be a common experience of Europeans, if one may judge by the spontaneous remarks of those I met in India. Even the Sacred River itself, with its bathing-ghats, its huddle of small temples, shrines and dwelling houses rising tier upon tier on its bank—bank, not banks, for only one side is auspicious—and its burning-ghats, on which the bodies of the dead are burned, made hardly a deeper impression, appealing rather as some-

thing sordid, ugly and rather pitiful than as a centre of deep religious significance. I am sure it is unfashionable to say this; I can only record my impression. The only occasion when it suggested to me a glimpse of hidden beauty was when I stood one evening as the sun was low on the horizon, diffusing a golden glow over the river together with a slight transfiguring haze that gave the scene an air of unreality and other-worldliness which is normally missing from the Indian scene. But on this occasion I was in fact looking away from Banaras, standing on the bank a little above Assi Ghat and, what is worse, looking across towards Ramanagar on the inauspicious side of the river.

Of course I saw Banaras during what may be called the off-season, when pilgrimages and festivals are least frequent. It is said that Banaras has more than four hundred festivals distributed over the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. These fall most thickly from July to October, and had I been there during some of the greater ones I might have received a different impression; there is always something strangely moving and fascinating in seeing thousands upon thousands of people all with a single purpose, whether it is an act of religion, a march into battle, or simply a desire to get away from a football match as quickly as possible. Still I had come expecting to find much more. Years before, on seeing pictures of the Ganges at Banaras with its temples and bathing-ghats, I had the feeling common to many people regarding some place or other that I had been there already and knew it all, that if I went there I should almost be able to find my way about. By Hindus this is interpreted as a fleeting memory of a former incarnation, but western psychologists have other explanations. In fact I did not recapture this sensation when eventually I found myself at Banaras.

PILGRIM TO THE SACRED RIVER

Homage to the Sacred River and ritual bathing in it is the central act for which pilgrims journey here. The official guide-book, published from New Delhi for tourists, described Banaras as 'the holiest place in Hinduism, being particularly loved of Lord Shiva'. (Shiva is one of the most prominent members of the

Indian pantheon, thought by modern scholars to be a non-Aryan deity taken over from the original Dravidian inhabitants of the land. His cult varies between the loftiest morality and practices less than respectable.) 'Hindus from all over the country', it continues, 'visit it every year and we can see here the inhabitants of the remotest parts of the land.'

I was impressed by these pilgrims, of very varied racial types and in great variety of dress, who had obviously travelled far, mostly on foot, and now threaded their way through the jostling crowds to the goal of their effort, the bath in the Sacred River. They were very eloquent mute witnesses to one of the outstanding realities of India, the sense of the presence of God and of the need to 'seek God, if happily they may feel after him or find him',[1] the attainment of a permanent, lasting union. Conspicuous among them were some with Tibetan dress and cast of feature, though whether they were really Tibetans, who do in fact come to the district in fair numbers on pilgrimage, I could not tell; for as one approaches the border people within Indian territory do take on Tibetan or at least Mongoloid features. Doubtless there is a great admixture of races. Rest houses are provided by private and public bodies for such pilgrims. 'It is in the early hours of the morning [again in the words of the guide book] that one sees the chanting devotees making their way to the sacred stream of Ganga. Having bathed in its waters they proceed to Visvanatha [i.e. the Golden] Temple where resides Lord Shiva, the presiding deity of Banaras.' In fact one may see them arriving throughout the day. I have already referred to the popular belief that all who die at Banaras will enter straight into nirvana, attain moksha, without any further reincarnation.

I did not personally venture into the waters of the Ganges. Chemical analysis has shown it to be quite pure and perfectly free from any disease germ in spite of all that goes into it. But what if all these germs, which undoubtedly do go into it, should be lying in wait for the first European who came near? One can never be sure. The best view of the bathing- and cremation-ghats, and of the temples, ashrams and houses that line the north bank of the Ganges, is obtained by taking a boat and allowing oneself to be rowed slowly along. Accordingly I made

[1] *Acts* xvii. 27.

my way down to the river one morning and finally, after resisting all offers to be taken for five, three, two, or even one and a half rupees, contracted with one man to be carried along the front and back for the sum of one rupee; though I did at the end of my tour also give something to the boatman's small son who several times during the trip had been in imminent danger of rolling overboard so that I had to grab the little clothing he had in order to restrain him. There was a fairly swift current, and a large black fish, like a porpoise or small shark, kept breaking water and circling the boat. As I entered the boat, a long, flat-bottomed vessel, another, completely naked, well-nourished small boy of about eight years of age, under the charge of his mother or nanny, stood knee-deep in the water, weeping bitterly at the indignity of being forcibly immersed in a sacred but rather cool Ganges so early on this December morning. He seemed quite regardless of the spiritual benefits that might accrue therefrom to his immortal soul.

As we passed along there was a fair sprinkling of people taking their ritual bath, but I must repeat that I found it uninspiring. One little vignette that does stand out in my recollection is of a middle-aged couple at the edge of the water, whether before or after their bath I cannot tell, the woman kneeling with eyes fixed on the water and hands joined in prayer and salutation. One cannot know what this woman was praying for, if it was a prayer of petition; but perhaps the most common of all petitions by Indian women is for children, and amid such a widespread desire for children a birth control campaign such as is at present under way seems to argue rather excessive optimism on the part of the planners.

Passing down-stream we came to the burning-ghats. One pyre was just burning down and laid out alongside was a little row of pitiful bundles awaiting their 'meed of fire'. On the return journey a new funeral pyre had been erected and another body was being placed in position on it. I was a little scandalized and surprised to see these bodies lying there without any mourners in sight, just consigned, apparently, to the care of the men, a very low caste, who attend to the pyres. When I later commented on this to friends in Banaras, they told me that this was quite customary; that the bodies are brought and handed

over, the mourners then retiring for refreshment. The brahmanic ritual requires the presence of relatives and friends. I relate this simply as I received it; it did not seem to come within the scope of my investigations. It may, however, be a partial explanation of complaints in the Indian press that bodies only partially consumed by fire could be seen floating down the Ganges, and of the fact that the Government was subsidizing a supply of wood in an attempt to ensure that bodies were properly burned. It may also account for the fish.

Normally it is, of course, only the ashes that are thrown into the water. The body is carried to cremation (or burial, for wood is scarce and so cremation comparatively costly) on an open bier, covered by a silken cloth, accompanied by the mourners with incense and at least bells and drums. It seems that from the earliest times both burning and burial were used and this was not expected to affect in any way the future destiny of the dead person. It was, however, considered of great importance that the body should not be injured by bird, animal or reptile. Passing through the back streets of a city it is possible to see a corpse on the pavement, propped up against a wall, while the bier is being prepared and the mourners wait patiently by. I was surprised, I say, at the absence of mourners because elsewhere I have seen them squatting in a little group close by, watching the flames leaping up. In a highly-coloured article in one of the principal Indian newspapers describing the death and cremation of a particularly promising schoolboy at a boarding-school in the hills, I understood that it was considered the duty of the nearest male relative at a definite stage in the process to give a push to the head with the aid of a long pole to ensure that this was fully consumed; only on this occasion, no male relative being present, it had to be done by one of the caste entrusted with the unclean (ritually defiling) task of cremation and contact with the dead. I shall mention later my efforts to find any belief in the resurrection of the body. Reunion of body with soul *seems* to be taught by the Vedas, the earliest Hindu 'scriptures', and this may be the reason for the care of the dead body, but the enigmatic, symbolic nature of these writings makes their interpretation very difficult.

I was carried down the whole length of the city 'front' and back again. Stone platforms with steps leading down to the

water were the principal feature of the scene. Laıge umbrellas were to be seen in considerable numbers, protecting the devotees from the sun. The river rises, sometimes dangerously, during the rainy season and one small, elaborately-carved temple had slid down the bank into the water where it stood now, leaning a little drunkenly but apparently quite whole.

Perhaps I should mention here the fortress palace of Ramanagar, the seat of the Maharaja, on the opposite bank of the river, facing the south side of the city, which I visited another day. This may be approached fıom the river by a long flight of broad steps. It is a noble and spacious group of buildings, and interesting to one who had not before been through an Indian royal residence; but the Victorian furnishings, left high and dry here, indicate that the flood that swept away emperors and empresses is carrying with it also rajas and ranis. But the Ram, or Rama, of the title is likely to endure longer. The name of this deity[1] is still used as a common greeting in the district, much as the name of Christ is in Catholic countries like the south of Germany, in the greeting 'Praised be Jesus Christ'; to which the reply is 'For ever. Amen.' In the north I was sometimes greeted by sadhus I met on the road simply by the sacred word OM, the name and in a sense almost the *re-presentation* of the Divinity, and felt that I must appear very boorish in not knowing the reply to this. Dramatic performances depicting legendary incidents from the life of Rama are specially famous here, principally in October.

[1] More precisely, he is worshipped, especially in the north, as an incarnation of Vishnu. There a popular form of evening prayer is the repetition of his name thousands of times. He is assumed to be identical with the legendary hero of the *Ramayana* (*The Adventures* (or *Wanderings*) *of Rama*), its earliest portion committed to writing about the fifth century B.C. but describing the life of a much earlier period. It is a romantic epic of great charm and beauty, but I notice that in the collection referred to (p. 38, n. 1) it is included under the heading 'Indian Imagination'. The evolution of the poem and the manner and stages of the apotheosis of its hero are disputed. Modern adherents of the sect of 'Ramaites', as distinct from the much greater number of his casual worshippers, are divided into the 'monkey-holders' and 'cat-holders'. The former hold that man achieves salvation by his own effort, clinging to God as a small monkey clings to its mother; the latter that it is all done by God, as a cat picks up its kitten in its mouth and carries it into safety. All seem to hold that the human soul is distinct from God.

I was landed at what I thought was my starting-point but proved to be a different spot some distance past this, so that in making my way to the main road I became involved in a regular maze of twisting, narrow lanes of the bazaar area, reminding me that in no country in the world have I seen so many shops, restaurants, stalls and itinerant vendors selling such a variety of food for consumption on the spot as I have in India. Since shops of the same kind tend to be grouped all together in one long line one wonders how the owners make even a lean living.

BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY

Banaras has always been a great centre of Hindu studies and a resort of teachers and scholars; Gautama Buddha, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Kabir and many others lived here for a time. The University of Banaras was founded only in the present century and appears to aim at achieving a synthesis between Indian and western thought. I was particularly looking forward to meeting Dr. Panikkar here. He, if anyone, with his wide knowledge and his practical experience of the Himalayas, would surely be able to direct me to a true yogi, both to one who had really attained to perfect, or at least a high degree of, realization, and to some who had the siddhis, or preternatural powers.

Dr. Panikkar is a Catholic priest, an Indian, who is officially simply a research student at the university, but by the extent of his reading, his mental equipment, and above all his enthusiasm for all things Indian and Hindu, has won for himself a position and a prestige that far exceed his nominal status. He had read deeply in ancient and modern Hindu philosophy, and was well acquainted with contemporary trends. He was also, of course, trained in scholastic philosophy, and so particularly well equipped to portray one school in terms of another. He also knew the numerous little religious groups and coteries and was able to give a sound, reasoned opinion on them. Unfortunately he was just about to leave for a conference in the Philippines when I arrived in Banaras, so that I was able to spend only an afternoon and evening with him. I was thus able to ask my primary questions and sound him on a few major topics, but there was no possibility of the further dis-



8. Ganges at Banaras.



9. Bathing-ghats at Banaras. In the centre a funeral pyre is burning out. In the left foreground a woman stands with hands folded in prayer.

cussions I had hoped for, since he was to be away for about three months.

Dr. Panikkar's conversation was brilliant, and his enthusiasm and oratory at times almost overwhelming, but I did not find what I was looking for. After a moment of consideration which in itself was an admission that such phenomena were to his knowledge at least not of frequent occurrence, he replied to my direct question that he believed that there were instances of people acquiring such extraordinary powers, that he had known men who claimed to have witnessed them, but that he himself had had no immediate experience of such things and could not tell me of anyone who had these powers today. Similarly, in reply to my request for information about anyone who had attained to a high degree of 'realization', in the Hindu idiom, or, in the Christian phrase, to eminent sanctity or union, a 'true yogi' with or without extraordinary powers, he was unable to direct me to one. He could only refer me to several people in the Almora district, whither I was bound, and assure me that if a true yogi was to be found, any one of these several people would be able to direct me to him. I did follow up the clues he gave, as I shall explain later.

Now, I attached great significance to this. Here was a man ideally fitted to direct me immediately to what I was looking for—if it existed. He had himself travelled incognito in the Himalayas on a quest very similar to my own: a desire to study Hinduism from the inside. He was, however, immeasurably better equipped and endowed in preparation for it; he had a lively interest in and wide knowledge of contemporary Hinduism with an extensive range of personal contacts. His enthusiasm for his subject and for the specifically Indian 'thing' certainly disposed him to present it in the best possible light. Yet he could not give me what I wanted and I hope I do him no injustice in saying that I seemed to notice a tendency to evade the question, so that time and again I had to revert to it. He was immersed in the theoretical aspects of a complex system; I was looking for its ripe fruit—if there was any. The reader should appreciate that I was speaking to him as to a fellow priest from whom I could expect complete frankness, knowing that we shared a philosophy of life in which we were perfectly agreed on essentials, and in discussion knew exactly what

could be taken for granted. It is unlikely that there should have been in the district a man of the type I was seeking and that he should not know it, and, having known of such a man, impossible that he should not have told me. He could not show me a true yogi, but it might be possible to learn something from him about contemporary Hinduism and I made the most of the little time at our disposal.

His dominant theme was that the Indian approach to religion is *essentially* different from that of the West; the Greek patristic tradition, he admitted, came nearest to it but did not go all the way. To present Christianity to India in a way that India could understand, one must present it from the Indian, more precisely the Hindu, point of view. Almost one must become a Hindu first in order to make this acceptable to the Hindu—'all things to all men'—at least one must know Hinduism from the inside. All this was obviously sound enough and in the tradition of the great Jesuit missionaries, de Nobili and others. He was not, however, able to tell me the nature of this unique quality in Hindu thought which carried it quite beyond the range of western speculation, though I repeatedly steered the conversation back to this precise point. It seemed almost that there was a new dimension accessible to the Indian mind alone and not yet to any other; but this I find *a priori* so unlikely, if not impossible, that I am unable to accept it without some demonstration, or at least some description of this new dimension. This I was not able to obtain.

I have already indicated[1] what seems to me the *spirit* and inner impulse of Hinduism, and I shall try to develop aspects of this as we go on. So much in Hinduism is a matter of 'feeling', the feeling that one can do, or ought to be able to do, something, or that something is true; it is comparatively unimportant whether or not anything on the material plane corresponds to it. Most fundamental of all, so far as my own observation goes, is the desire to travel beyond this world and beyond ourselves, to transcend our material limitations, and the feeling that we can almost do it. In the West this urge may have been in some degree temporarily sated by investigations into the possibility of space travel; but there is quite a lot of space to cover, and when we have done that there still remains the original prob-

[1] Cf. pp. 51 ff. Cf. also p. 229.

lem of how to travel beyond space. The fundamentally Indian problem is still how to transcend space itself, and the underlying idea seems to be that you can if you want to hard enough. This is not quite so irrational as it may seem at first sight, and I shall suggest later a certain analogy between this mentality and the faith that literally, so we are assured though I never saw it done, 'moves mountains': but there are within everyone's experience instances of similar if less spectacular results.

Unfortunately this mentality makes discussion very difficult; reiteration is mistaken for argument and one is sometimes overwhelmed by a torrent of words while remaining unconvinced—'what I tell you three times is true'. It may be that Dr. Panikkar had something like this in mind, but I never got round to framing it in quite this way, and he was not able to define what he meant.

One does sometimes meet in the speech and writings of enthusiastic Christian students of Hinduism—not, I hasten to add, that I know anything of this kind in Dr. Panikkar's words or writings—statements that almost suggest the idea that Christianity will not be complete until it has absorbed Hindu thought; almost giving the impression that what is really in the thinker's mind is the idea not so much that Hinduism is, in the design of God, a preparation (for the Hindu) for Christianity, as Christianity is a preparation for Hinduism. There are undoubtedly aspects of Christianity that receive more emphasis in the theory of Hinduism than in Christianity itself and so may help to recall a Christian to a fuller appreciation of his own tradition. The Hindu's own approach could perhaps be better described as trying to be Christ without the aid of Christianity. The true yogi such as I was seeking should, on his own hypothesis, have assimilated all the Christian values, be more Christian than the Christian, have become the perfect Christian. He should, in fact, have gone on, in his perfect 'realization' and 'oneness' with God, to such a perfection of Christianity, involving such a complete and permanent restoration of preternatural and supernatural powers as is claimed by Christians to have been demonstrated in Christ himself. Had I been directed to such a one, or to one well on the road to this, my quest might have ended there and then. One thing at least was clear: that my host knew of no such example.

IN SEARCH OF A YOGI

It was in company with Dr. Panikkar and Fr. Mercier, a European student of Hinduism, that I walked down from the university area to the river. There we took a boat across to Ramanagar and then recrossed to Assi Ghat, a spot a little downstream where the Assi runs into the Ganges. Fr. Mercier is in some sense a colleague of Dr. Panikkar, but, as befits a relative of the great Cardinal, of a more coldly logical and rational cast of mind. He told me that, as a little addition to his normal duties, he gave teaching in morals or ethics to a class of 14–15-year-old children in the Catholic High School, using the Bible and *Life of Christ* as the basis of his teaching. All but a very few of his pupils were, of course, non-Christian, but it is typical of Indian mentality that this use of the Bible and of Our Lord's life should not be considered as proselytizing, but accepted as quite natural and reasonable: Christ was an outstandingly holy man, an incarnation of God; Gandhiji himself read and quoted him: what better basis for moral instruction for their children? But it would not occur to them that this might be a reason for becoming Christians. Why indeed should they, if their whole cosmic career with its series of births was simply realizing their oneness with God of whom Christ was simply one incarnation?

At Assi Ghat I was able to observe the men, usually regular sadhus, swamis or sannyasis but not always, who sit for hour after hour, cross-legged on the ground on the banks of Ganges in silent meditation. Just at the spot where we landed there were two of them, seemingly of opposite types and dispositions. Perhaps I should say here that the bank of the Ganges where it flows through the city is, in addition to the regular, permanent buildings, studded with temporary shacks and shelters erected by those who wish to dwell there whether temporarily or permanently. It is also disfigured by litter and the drainage from the houses on the front, and even outside festival times there is a constant traffic of people milling around. It is not the place one might expect the naturally contemplative soul to choose for his contemplation.

The first of the two men we saw was squatting on a small mat some yards up from the water's edge, surrounded by a little

group of men with whom he was chatting cheerfully. I am reasonably certain that these men were not earnest seekers after the light but there out of sheer curiosity; but of course I may have been mistaken. In any case he seems to have been explaining his technique to them. The sadhu, sannyasi or whatever he was, was naked except for a small loincloth, his hair oiled and twisted into a topknot, with the usual marks on the forehead and face, and body smeared with the ashes that give such men an unearthly grey look. There is no doubt that all this war-paint does impress the ordinary man. Round his neck were hanging the usual rows of heavy wooden beads. I have always wondered at the splendid physique of so many of these men who sit thus in all their naked glory. I have seen some who could do with a course of slimming and I have seen lean ones, but I never saw one emaciated and under-nourished; and this is remarkable in a land where malnutrition is the rule for the poorer sort. It could, of course, be due to the recovery by the spirit of mastery over matter; one of the yogic claims is the power of living without eating, but I should be surprised to find that the people I saw had progressed so far. This man was well-padded, and probably soft physically, but there was no obvious obesity.

As we approached he looked with interest at these three Christian clerics of whom two were obviously European. One of the little group squatting around him, perhaps desirous of displaying his knowledge of English, said with a grin: 'Yogi', then: 'It comes out of the top of his head.' I was about to ask what exactly it was that came out of the top of his head, but, anticipating this, he continued: 'Watch him do it.' Whereupon the 'yogi' assumed what is called the 'lotus posture' (it can be seen in the well-known seated statue of Buddha), legs folded beneath him, the weight thrown on to the spinal column, hands resting lightly on either knee with thumb and index finger joined. Then with eyes closed he proceeded to inhale in the typical manner that ensures the maximum intake of air. The procedure was accompanied by a low sound midway between a whistle and a hum, such as one might expect from a volume of air rushing through a narrow aperture. After retaining his breath for a time, while remaining motionless, he exhaled and relaxed.

What he was supposed to have done was not clear to me, but my priest companions were obviously not impressed. As an exhibition of breath control it was not a notable achievement: I could have done at least as much myself. He had certainly not entered into *samadhi* (trance)[1] in this short interval. I presume that it was the technique of *pranayama*, breath control, that he had been explaining and demonstrating to this little group as preparatory to samadhi. I am not sure, however, what they thought it was that 'comes out of the top of his head'. Whatever it was. I had the impression that they thought the noise was produced by its coming 'out of the top of his head'. There was an obvious suggestion here of kundalini yoga, where the process of 'realization', release or liberation, is conceived physiologically as the arousing of *kundalini*, the 'serpent power', the divine energy lying dormant in the lower part of the body near the root of the spinal column, and the drawing it up progressively through the *chakras*, or plexuses, until it reaches the apex of the brain where it is finally released and absorbed in or identified with God, its source (described variously as Brahman, Atman (Self), the Infinite, the World-Soul etc.). In effect man, becoming identified with God, attains to complete dominion over himself and over all things. Recently attempts have been made to identify kundalini with the vagus nerve.[2] The literature of

[1] *Samadhi*, usually translated as 'trance', although it entails insensibility to impressions from the world of phenomena, is not, of course, to be envisaged as a form of unconsciousness or deep sleep. It is rather a heightened, intensified consciousness on a higher plane, sometimes called 'super-consciousness'. In the widest sense it is what St. Thomas is speaking of when he says that in our present state we are hindered by external phenomena from contemplation of 'intelligible realities'. Normally (in the 'state of innocence' and as the term of the process of 'redemption') we should be capable of perceiving all planes of reality simultaneously, one, as it were, through the other. Cf. pp. 48 and 230, and, for degrees of samadhi, p. 297.

[2] Cf. *The Mysterious Kundalini*, Vasant G. Rele (D. B. Taraporevala Sons and Co., Bombay, 1927), p. 57. The idea that a 'supernatural' state may be reached by control of the vagus nerve and the sympathetic nervous system is startling to the western mind. It must be remembered that for the Hindu the material body and the material world are simply the 'extension' of the spiritual and true self, the form this has taken and in which it has, as it were, become atrophied and fossilized. The true self has to be awakened, regain control over the whole system—the body and its world—and gradually realize its full potentiality. As we have seen, it is difficult, if not impossible, to know if this final state of 'realization' is for the Hindu truly what

the subject is extensive and intricate. The underlying notion on which it is based is, so far as I am able to trace it, first found in the *Aitareya Upanishad*, where 'creation' is explained as God (described as *Atman* or Self) diffusing himself into the world of creation by means of a microcosmic person (*Viraj*). The final stage in the creation of man was the opening of the suture at the top of the human skull, through which he himself entered and took up his abode in the human brain. Looking out from this point at creation he realizes that it is nothing other than himself.[1] It is possible that the 'yogi' had been explaining something of this to his audience; whether in that case there had been some confusion on his part, or they had misunderstood him, I do not know. I bowed and thanked him; he bowed and smiled acknowledgement. We went on our way.

About thirty yards up the bank was a similar man, but of different calibre, at least so it seemed; and as we threaded our way towards him through the people and the general debris, my companions said: 'This looks more like it.' This man was dressed in the saffron robes of a regular sadhu or sannyasi and seated on a mat in the usual 'lotus posture' of meditation. His eyes were open and he was apparently not in samadhi, or trance, but was quite regardless of all that was going on about him. He paid no attention to us, but I did notice a movement of the eyes which suggested that he had seen us and was conscious of our presence. It would not be considered rude in India to stand and stare at a man of this kind, as I shall explain later; on the contrary, to sit down in front of him, sense his personality and absorb his 'radiations', have *darshan*, audience, of him in this way would be considered a meritorious act. This apart from the fact that a man who does this kind of thing might be considered as asking for it.

He was a more spare, serious, ascetic-looking type than the other, and I would have liked to speak to him but hesitated to interrupt his meditation. I came to look for him another day

the Christian calls 'supernatural', and not merely an indefinite extension of the natural—extended beyond the limits we normally know but still on the same, the natural, plane. But see again pp. 44 ff. and pp. 227 ff.

[1] Cf. *Outline of Hinduism*, p. 131. The theory of the 'sheaths' of the soul (cf. p. 51), met for the first time in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, seems to be fundamentally the same, entailing progressive withdrawal from external phenomena.

but he had gone, though his little booth still remained and it may have been only temporary absence. This little booth (I can think of no other word to describe it) was about seven feet long by three, raised about two feet above the ground, with the front completely open except for one tiny corner which was curtained off. The sadhu sat in full view in the centre of this tiny shelter, looking out over the river. I had been advised by a friend in Poona to seek out a man who had sat for years on the banks of the Ganges somewhere about this spot, living on only liquid food, but, as my Banaras friends said, there are so many of these men that it would be difficult to trace the one I wanted. Possibly this was he. Only these two were to be seen this afternoon and the other almost certainly took more than liquid food. As I have said, this was not the season; it was winter and the evenings could be comparatively chilly. On my first evening I found myself shivering although the thermometer, when I consulted it, did register 70° F. in the shade.

The performance of the first man puzzled me, and still puzzles me: I mean not what he did, which was insignificant enough, but the fact of his doing it, of this display to us of his accomplishments. Dr. Panikkar, who, being an Indian, should have understood him better than I did, thought that in an Indian this need not be just exhibitionism; my other companion was not so sure. I am inclined to think that he was not just an exhibitionist in the sense in which the term is generally used. There was such a completely childlike, unselfconscious naïvety and simplicity about the whole business, suggesting a small child who has acquired a new accomplishment and wants to share it with the whole world: 'Come and see what I've got!' But whether it is consonant with any considerable degree of spiritual maturity I do not know: I have my doubts. I feel it was probably an instance of the tendency I shall say more about later, to concentrate on externals with a proportionate disregard for the more interior reality—'face' in its widest connotation.

But this is only one aspect of a wider question involving both of the men I saw: If men really want to withdraw into themselves, away from the external world of maya or illusion, why do they choose the bank of a river in the centre of a city thronged with people? A mile or so away, up or down stream,

they could have enjoyed unbroken peace and solitude, except possibly for the odd person who may have wished to consult them. This was one of the first questions that came to my mind when I landed in India at the sight of a man buried by the side of a busy road on the outskirts of Bombay, simply hands and feet sticking up out of the ground in a startlingly appealing manner that made one feel one ought to go and shake them. What was his primary object? Realization, union with God? Breath control, in his own system, might serve as a preparation for this, but if he felt it necessary to bury himself (not very deeply) to acquire it, then why choose a public spot for it? Did he want to ensure that he would not be overlooked when the time came for him to be dug up? Was he perhaps simply 'showing off'? Or was it his wish to draw others to emulate him: 'Let your light so shine before men . . .'? I would like to think this is the explanation, but I cannot in honesty say that I do. In the case of the first man I saw it did, so I thought, resemble the simplicity of the child: the simplicity (in the best sense) of the Indian can be as simple as all that. In the case of the man who had had himself buried I am less sure.[1]

I was never able to find a completely satisfactory answer to this problem, though I tried to elicit the views of those I met who might be expected to know. A sadhu in the hills, whose judgement on other matters seemed to me exceptionally sound and shrewd, said unhesitatingly: 'I'm afraid it's just exhibitionism.' He did, however, go on to qualify this judgement by saying that he had known a sadhu, now dead (though 'dead' is not quite the term in this context), who lived on the banks of the Ganges in sight of all, staring all day into the sun (he eventually became quite blind and crippled) who, he considered, was quite genuine and radiated a 'real aura of sanctity'.

[1] It is a favourite practice of yogis of the more spectacular type to bury themselves completely for hours, days and even months. Breath control seems to be the explanation of this when it is done for merely hours or days, and it has been established that a man can survive longer buried in earth than when enclosed in an air-tight concrete chamber (cf. p. 218). Longer periods are probably to be explained by a slowing-down of the heart and of the whole bodily metabolism analogous to the hibernation of lower animals. It is possible, at least for short periods, to regulate the action of the heart and the circulation so that the heart appears to stop, and is inaudible though it still registers on an electrocardiogram.

Some remarks of this same sadhu that arose out of a discussion on the place of monastic work may provide a clue to at least a partial explanation.

A sadhu who does wish to live alone as a hermit in the woods or the hills must literally 'set up in business'. There may have been a time, and there may still be some places in the world, where a man can retire, say, into the forest and live on the few herbs and fruits he might find there; but there must be very few places left today where it can be done, and India, with its teeming and near-starving millions, is not one of them. The gaining of one's living by manual work is recommended to sadhus by some Indian spiritual writers, but my own impression is that it was not at all in favour and that tradition was all against it. It would, in any case, be very difficult in an isolated spot to find suitable work that would secure the necessities of life, and not many kinds of work would be compatible with the long hours of physical immobility demanded by their technique. It seems, then, that they are more or less driven to take up a position where they may attract a clientele prepared to support them, and it is a measure of the Indian's reverence for the potentially holy that he is always more than ready to support such men, in the same way as, from his meagre resources, he supports the hordes of beggars that swarm on the Indian roads. Should business flourish, his clients increase in number—and of course a few signs and wonders will always help—he may be able to retire to a more remote spot where the reputation for holiness he has now acquired will follow him and support continue. Or someone with the means may build him a little temple and shelter, in which case he will probably be cremated or buried on the spot; the temple will be ever associated with him and he will be well on the way to deification. How simple and rapid this process of deification might be was impressed on me in the Himalayas when, with a shock and some embarrassment, I myself experienced what I felt might easily have been its first stages.

I had been to visit two sadhus up in the hills and had walked back to the road where I hoped to be able to catch a bus to the village where I intended to stay the night. The bus stop, as I had already ascertained, was opposite a little group of small tumble-down buildings with a small open space in front shaded by a

large tree. There is no doubt that the few local people in this rather remote spot had seen me arrive earlier in the day and knew where I had been; also, as I think I have already said, I was invariably recognized, in spite of my unlikely dress, as some kind of monk or priest. As I approached these buildings the owner hurried out, bowed, and asked if I would like tea. I thanked him but refused, since I had only just consumed a flask of coffee. He then produced a chair, carefully dusted it, set it down in the shade of the tree and asked me to be seated. (Although Indians, particularly the poorer sort, and countryfolk especially, do squat on the ground, they frequently have an odd chair which they produce for an honoured guest, particularly for a European who is not accustomed to squatting.) He next produced three single flowers of different varieties and with some ceremony presented them to me. Then, going round his fruit trees and examining them carefully, he removed what must have been his best two oranges and two lemons, arranged them in a basket and placed them at my feet. I was quite at a loss to know what my own reaction ought to be, apart from smiling and thanking him, and I was not sorry when the bus arrived and I was able to escape from any possible apotheosis.

Not uncommonly such sadhus or 'holy men' move from place to place, living off the country as they move. I met such a one at Ranikhet, for instance, in the Himalayas, who had taken up a position in a little clearing of trees between the cantonment and the bazaar. He, or his publicity agent (I do not wish to be cynical, but this is the impression given), had set up a small awning and, at the entrance to the clearing, two long poles, nine or ten feet apart, with, stretched between them, a great banner inscribed with characters I was unable to read. (I had been very impressed for some time by large characters, beautifully painted, about three feet high, on the side of a small temple near Poona, supposing that they conveyed some lofty spiritual teaching; only to find on enquiry that it was an advertisement for the local cinema. However, this banner undoubtedly did refer to the sadhu who was in session.) An Indian lady to whom I spoke (not a Catholic) was very sarcastic on the subject of his business methods and the amount of money he was receiving, and was certainly not of the opinion that he was

of outstanding sanctity. Some time earlier a similar 'holy man' had appeared with a claim to have power of healing diseases at a word or touch. Many were healed, or convinced that they were; unfortunately, on his departure they found they were just as bad as before, though relieved of some of their money. Since my time was limited I thought it unlikely that this particular man was so holy as to be worth an interview, and when I returned a few days later, after a journey further into the hills, he had left. But a little group of people still met on the spot for the equivalent of what in England would be a prayer-meeting with hymns and chants supported by the beating of drums and ringing of bells.

It is difficult to classify the various categories of sadhus who live in community, or wander the roads, or live as hermits. Of the genuine sort some may have taken up the life only for a period, and it is possible to mistake ordinary pilgrims for professional sadhus. Though it is not observed much in modern times, traditionally the life of a Hindu should follow four ashramas or stages: beginning as a celibate student; going on to the state of a married householder, fulfilling the duties of a father; retiring in the next stage to the forest for prayer and contemplation; and in the final stage making complete renunciation of all things and living on alms as a wandering sannyasi.

My methods as indicated here may seem a little haphazard, but I am convinced that in a country where even the least pretension to holiness or the exercise of extraordinary powers receives such immediate acclaim and veneration, it is impossible that I should not have heard of any really outstanding practitioner in the places I visited: the whole district would have been agog with it. It was, of course, possible that there might be hidden away in some secluded nook of the Himalayas unknown to anyone, or to only a few, the true yogi I was seeking. This was precisely the reason my journey led up to this as to its climax. Here I was only on the way, prepared to profit by anything I might find as I went along.

To return to Banaras, as we left the two sadhus and stood listening a little further on to a sadhu of a more active temper (already referred to) explaining the epic of Rama to a small but attentive audience, we noticed at a little distance a tall, young, handsome, bearded sadhu, apparently a European, picking his

way carefully along by the water's edge. It was near sunset and he may have been going to bathe. My companions knew him well by sight and told me he was a Frenchman who had embraced Hinduism. They thought he was also a doctor of medicine. He noticed us but showed no inclination to stop, so we did not speak to him.

It was already dark when I left my friends, and since I had two or three miles to travel by a rather tortuous route through the city into the cantonment, where I wanted to arrive in time for dinner, I took a cycle-rickshaw. I have forgotten what the agreed fare was, but it was something very small and I added something to it when paying off the driver, though in fact one does not tip taxi or rickshaw drivers. There are in Banaras between three and four hundred thousand people, and it is estimated that the number of cycle-rickshaws is about thirteen thousand. There is in addition a considerable number of cars, buses, cycles, pony-carts, cattle, goats, not to mention camel caravans; and none of them have any traffic sense worth mentioning—except possibly the camels: at least they always seem quite imperturbable. The cycle-rickshaw wallahs are fond of jostling for position with any rivals they overtake and are liable to execute sudden violent swerves which might easily throw out a passenger who was not prepared for it.

It is in this part that one begins to see camels. I never saw them in India south of this, presumably because it is in the north that the desert areas occur. Here they may be seen frequently in small caravans carrying goods, or resting on open land at the side of the road. I did not see here, as I saw in Karachi, the ultimate degradation: a camel drawing a cart. There it is fairly common. The camel still had its typically haughty, supercilious stare, but one felt instinctively that this was now only a mask; its spirit was broken: beneath the mask it realized that it had lost for ever the answer to that last great question of all, known before to itself as well as to Allah.

'THE WHEEL OF THE LAW'—SARNATH

Though not originally included in my itinerary I decided to take the opportunity of visiting Sarnath. It was here in the sixth century B.C. that Gautama the Buddha preached his first

sermon and so, in the technical phrase, first 'set turning the Wheel of the Law'. In other words it is here that Buddhism officially began. The place is about six miles in a northerly direction from Banaras, and to reach it I had to borrow a bicycle from my hosts. There is a good road and the run was very enjoyable once I had got clear of the twisting roads of the town and was able to take my bearings. The sun at this season is never excessively hot and this was early, in the cool of the morning.

There were the usual familiar Indian sights on the road and in the little villages I passed through—only I did not see any pilgrims. I am assured that they do flock there in great numbers, Tibetans especially, and only the previous evening I had seen a little group of Tibetans encamped on a bit of waste ground outside the cantonment railway station. In fact I had been pursued by one of them, an exceptionally pretty little sloe-eyed girl in search of baksheesh. A couple of evenings later I was able to observe on the same spot a very small, plump, round-faced Tibetan boy, with shaven head, and dressed in long, brown padded tunic reaching to his ankles. I estimated his age at four to five years. He was leaning against the trunk of a tree and puffing vigorously at what in its present context appeared to be a king-sized cigarette.

Nor did I see at Sarnath any obvious pilgrims as distinct from mere sightseers. On the way back I did pass an old, wrinkled, parchment-faced Tibetan man in his broad, low cone-shaped hat, bent almost double beneath his not very bulky pack. About two miles this side of Sarnath I passed what I took to be three Buddhist novices in a rickshaw parked at the side of the road. They were boys of about twelve to fourteen years of age, with intelligent, refined features, Tibetan rather than Indian, with shaven heads and dressed in the characteristic long ochre robes. When I was on my way back several hours later they were still in the same spot and still seated in the rickshaw. I wondered vaguely why they had not got out and walked the remaining two miles, if they were all that anxious to get there and had a genuine thirst for enlightenment and a liberation from the 'wheel': but they seemed quite happy where they were, chatting and teasing one another in typical schoolboy fashion.

The general appearance of Sarnath was in marked contrast with most of the Hindu temples I had seen. Its well-preserved buildings, trim lawns and gardens, its order, cleanliness and neatness gave it an air of peace and dignity. Here was a place where one might indeed sit and meditate; which is precisely what one European priest in Banaras told me he did when he had a half-day free and was able to come over for an hour or so.

Here again it is a European who is speaking. I have still to be convinced that Indians as a race are as naturally 'contemplative' as people of the West commonly think they are. My own impression, suggested already if not explicitly stated, is that they tend rather to concentrate on externals both in secular and religious matters. This is certainly true of popular religious devotions with their colour, sound and movement; good, and with their necessary place, but they do not allow much scope for entering into oneself. That they are able to sit for long hours is obvious; but whether they are sitting and thinking (or contemplating) or just sitting is not so clear. While I was in India a 'holy man' who was reputed not to have slept for a number of years, I think twenty or more, was interviewed by a reporter of one of the leading papers. Asked if it was true that he had not slept all these years, he replied cheerfully: 'Not a wink.' It struck me at the time and I still wonder about it: Would it not be equally true, perhaps, to say that he had not been *awake* for all these years? It is certainly true—it is evident in some degree in the case of very old, inactive people—that when most of the day is spent in a state mid-way between waking and sleeping, it is not possible to sleep at night. There is no doubt in my own mind that in the vast majority of cases of men who sit immobile on the banks of the Ganges or elsewhere, there is not very much going on except the sitting. In the Christian tradition the final state of man (the one in this respect from which he has fallen) is one in which perfect contemplation is combined with activity—they are different aspects of one and the same act—though, in order to regain this, regular periodic withdrawal from the things of sense is necessary. It is this last that the average man finds most difficult, especially in the beginning, and so in practice it is this that has to be emphasized most.

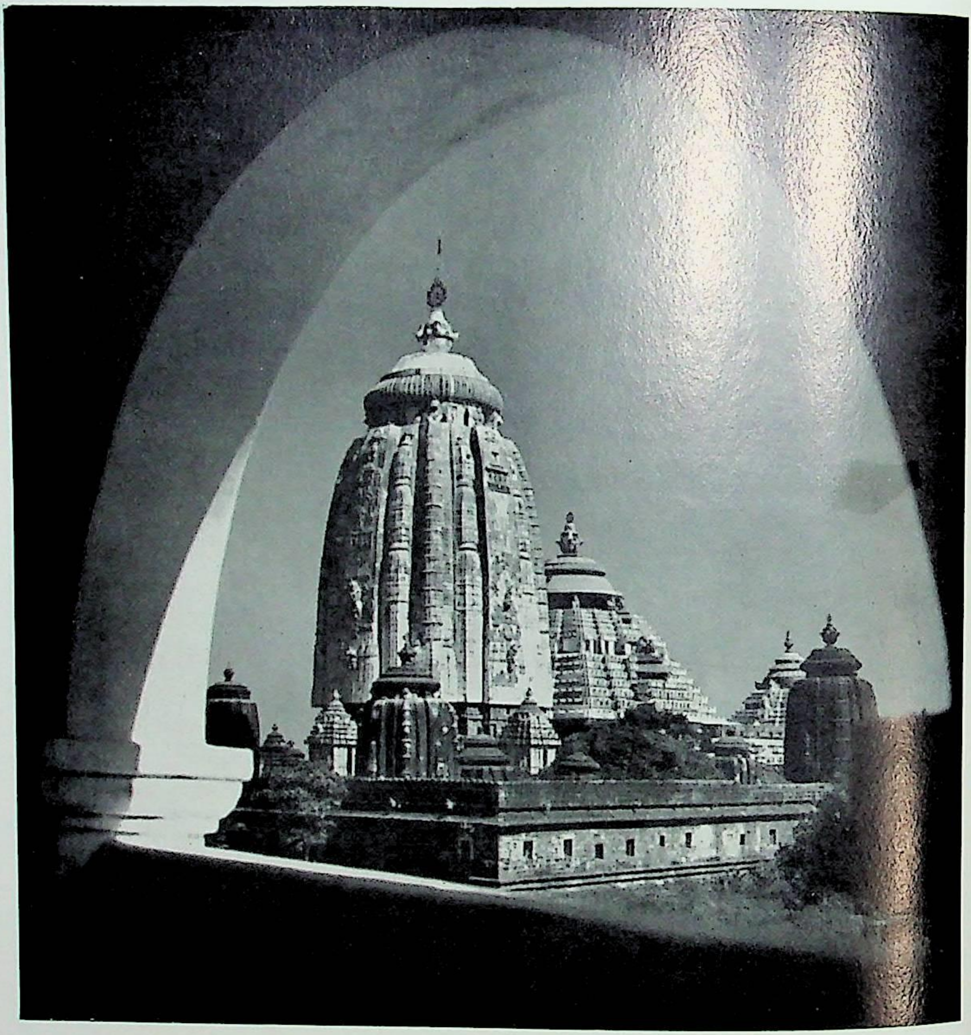
It is possible to see here the *stupa*, cairn or monument,[1] marking what is said to be the actual spot where Buddha met the five disciples who had deserted him earlier, and began his preaching. Excavations have been made and are still in progress, and close by is an archaeological museum, well designed and arranged, and approached through a tastefully laid-out and colourful garden. Here is to be seen the original triple lion from the pillar of Asoka (third century B.C.) which has been adopted as the national symbol and is to be seen on official stamps, army badges, etc. A little to the east of a larger, the *dharnek* stupa, is a modern Buddhist temple, built in 1931, not large, but on simple, dignified lines. Opposite the temple is a large rest-house in which, I was told, pilgrims could receive free board and lodging for short periods. In the same area is a Chinese temple, built in Chinese style, and also a Jain temple.

I heard in Banaras, from one who was in a position to know, that the development and maintenance of this site is being actively encouraged by the government as a tourist attraction and that also, for its own sake, it is heavily subsidized by Buddhist groups in England and the United States. Whatever the cause and the motives, the effect is eminently satisfactory. A

[1] Cf. photograph on pl. 10. Scholars have suggested that the Buddhist stupa had its origin in the simple funeral tumulus, but in history and legend it has always been much more and seems to have been regarded as radiating a spiritual influence over the whole surrounding countryside through the relics—ashes, or merely clothing, begging-bowl, scriptures, or simply statue—of the monk or guru contained within it. It seems to have been designed explicitly, with a most intricate and elaborate symbolism, as a microcosm, 'an image of the mighty world'; but not, I think, as simply an image or model, rather as its pattern, its source and origin. The ashes of the guru, his clothing, the means by which he supported his earthly existence, the visible world itself, all at further removes seem to be envisaged as manifestations of the invisible Self. This is the point at which the visible world emerges from the invisible and recedes into it. It has been suggested (Hermann Goetz, *India*, pp. 88 ff., 1958, in the Methuen *Art of the World* series) that Indian temple architecture deliberately developed a similar concept between the fifth and eighth centuries, seeing the temple as a microcosm, a 'sacrificial microcosm'. The *cella* beneath the central spire *conceals* the image or symbol of the god who is *manifested* in the building, especially in the central spire and in the shrines of the lesser deities that may surround it: the god is both in and beyond the visible world. The whole is set on a plinth which is seen as an altar of sacrifice on which man passes from the visible world and becomes one with God.



10. 'The Wheel of the Law.' Dharnek Stupa (p. 130 and note) and excavated site at Sarnath, six miles north of Banaras, marking the dwelling of Gautama Buddha in the sixth century B.C. and the monastic buildings that later grew up round it. The spot where Buddha, after his 'enlightenment,' met the five disciples who had deserted him, and first began to preach his doctrine, is marked by a smaller stupa not visible in this photograph. The temple mentioned on p. 131 is in the left background.



11. Temple of Jagannath (Juggernaut: 'Lord of the World,' i.e. of Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, one of what is often called the 'Hindu Trinity' of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu) at Puri, Orissa (p. 106 and note). Krishna is the hero of the Bhagavad Gita (p. 42). In addition to the fine spire (*sikhara*) it offers an example of the pyramidal structure more often found in the temple gateway (*gopura*), but here used as a cupola or dome (*vimana*).

collection of well-produced and simply-written pamphlets and books, in English as well as Indian languages, is on sale in the temple, near the entrance, confirming what was already well known, that a vigorous effort is being made to popularize and spread Buddhism. It would, however, be unfair, I think, to attribute to direct American influence the fact that when the Dalai Lama paid his formal, official visit to Sarnath, after his escape from Tibet, he was offered for his refreshment nothing less than a bottle of Coca-Cola.

The interior of this principal temple, its exterior so typically Indian Buddhist, was so simple, well-designed and cared for that for a moment I felt it was almost too good to be true; it was so unlike what one had previously seen and heard of places of worship in the East. The interior is a simple, long rectangle, completely empty except for the bookstall I have mentioned. At the far end is what would correspond to choir and sanctuary in a Christian church with, in place of an altar, a colossal gilded statue of the seated Buddha, beneath hangings of coloured silk. I have forgotten how the roof is supported—I think on wooden beams—but there are no pillars to interrupt the view of the statue. The walls are covered with murals by a Japanese artist depicting incidents from the life of the Buddha.

The dominant scene, on what in a Christian church would be the north wall, showed Buddha being assaulted by what we would call all the powers of evil. There they are surrounding him on all sides, hurling arrows, stones from slings, fiery darts, spurts of flame, breathing out tempests and typhoons from swelling cheeks, 'the arrow that flies by day, the Thing that goes about in the dark, the noonday devil': all in the best Japanese horrific manner. But in the middle of it all he sits calm and imperturbable, with his inscrutable near-smile. Why, after all, should he heed it, since he knows it is all maya, illusion? He has merely to close the eyes of his soul to it, and it has gone. 'His truth shall encompass thee as with a shield.'

In a country where they are still searching for an Indian style of Christian architecture it struck me at once that if the murals were to depict in Christian medieval fashion the chief events of sacred history from the creation to the new heaven and new earth of the Apocalypse on either wall, with in the centre, joining the two and taking the place of the Buddha, a

simple slab altar that emphasizes the essential purpose of an altar, whereon is 're-presented' the central fact of human history, the life, death and resurrection of the God-Man, it would form an exquisite Christian church. The subjects of the murals would have to be carefully worked out: Buddha, Shiva, Rama and the rest might have their place as the prophets of the 'nations', preparing for, and in a certain sense prefiguring, the Saviour who was to come. What a ready-made course of sermons such a building would supply to a busy parish priest, with its visual presentation of the commerce between heaven and earth effected at the altar; the imperfect and partial manifestations of it depicted on the walls, the visible world taking what it has of reality from the One Reality made present on the altar, and, once separated from it, only maya and illusion, a headlong plunge into 'non-entity' which can never become complete nonentity, the merging of the individual into God in the act of communion in which, far from losing his identity, he realizes for the first time his true self. What an invaluable visual aid it would all be—and what a howl of protest would arise from the Indian faithful if their devoted pastor should ever be rash enough to attempt any such thing.

In several places in the area are notices in Hindi and English stating that it is forbidden by the State under pain of a heavy fine to kill any animal or bird within a certain radius (I think a mile or more), or to bring into the area any flesh for consumption or any other purpose.

Because of that unfortunate habit of mine already mentioned, of marking out a path for myself and then declining neither to the right nor to the left, since I had not intended to visit this spot so now it did not even occur to me to seek an interview with any of the monks who lived here. I did learn later that there was an English *bhikshu* (Buddhist monk) among them, from whom I might perhaps have learned something useful.

On my way from the museum to the temple I had been approached by a small girl of eleven or twelve years of age, wearing only a small loincloth and carrying, straddled across the hip in characteristic Indian fashion, a small baby boy whom I assumed to be her brother (there is rarely any room for doubt concerning the sex of babies in the villages of India). She wanted baksheesh, and it was only too obvious that both

she and her brother needed all the baksheesh they could get. I gave her something, not a large sum but clearly from the expression on her face more than she had expected. I rarely do anything without foreseeing only too clearly in all their horror all the possible consequences, and on this occasion the consequences followed immediately. I am prepared to swear that there were no other children in sight when I bestowed this small alms, yet immediately a little gaggle of them sprang up fully armed from the earth, all demanding baksheesh. This, as I have said, I foresaw as almost inevitable, posing the to me insoluble problem of where one is to stop. I remember a similar occasion in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, when I was admirably firm and inflexible: and I have never ceased to regret it.

On that occasion I was on my way, walking, to the railway station in Trivandrum city, not far from the great temple, and had given something to a small boy who had importuned me. This rash action caused to materialize a whole host of other small boys. I gave a little to one or two more, then said: 'Enough—no more: finis.' I gradually succeeded in shaking them off, though it was like running the gauntlet, with one after another suddenly appearing at my side until, just as I was about to enter the station and considered myself safe, a boy about ten years old simply hurled himself at me. For all I know he may have been pursuing me from the very beginning, but here he pleaded for baksheesh with an eloquence of word and gesture I have never seen equalled before or since. He raised his hands to heaven and bowed low; he flung out both arms; he touched the tips of my toes with his fingers and raised his hands to his forehead; he tried to clasp my knees: all this accompanied by a regular torrent of eloquence which was entirely lost on me since I understood not a word of it. But this was the moment for firmness, and firm I was. Perhaps I was not fierce enough in my refusal: I do always feel sorry for them, and I expect they realize it: it might be kinder to be a little more unkind. I went on my way and the child danced round me. I entered the enquiry office where I was invited to take a chair, and he waited outside for about fifteen minutes peering in at the door. I then made for the booking office, trying to ignore him, but his eloquence, gesticulation and gyrations

began again with renewed vigour. At this stage people round about began to rebuke him, but he was undismayed, while I, by this time, was so determined that nothing would have moved me. He pursued me out of the station and about half a mile to the main road, where I finally caught a bus to Archbishop's House, some three or four miles outside the city. He pleaded up to the moment the bus moved off, and I remained adamant.

Long before this it had become merely a battle of wills; but we were very unevenly matched and it was a poor victory. I have always wished I had given the child something, and were I sufficiently advanced in the science of yoga to send it by some astral mode of transmission, I would do so now. Such a few coppers would have given him untold happiness for a few moments while these few coppers more or less would have made little difference to me. But then again, what if I had given him something and this had triggered off, as almost certainly it would have done, another chain reaction of small boys?

Where does one stop? One might dispose of everything, retaining just the minimum of clothing required by decency (a very slight amount this by Indian standards); and that I might have done in about five minutes on this occasion. But what then? The business of starting off a monastic community, my purpose in coming to India, would have come to an abrupt full stop. And once a monastic community is founded, though the individual members own nothing, a certain amount of property is essential for the continuation of the community. One could then be recklessly generous, never refusing real need and deliberately leaving it to the Lord to provide. There are many precedents for this, when the Lord has indeed provided in a remarkable way. Even in my own experience there have been many occasions when my, not reckless but as I suspected rather rash, generosity has immediately produced more than ample repayment—only in the average community monks do not commonly look with a kindly eye on such behaviour, and a superior who habitually adopted such tactics would soon be faced with a demand for his resignation. What a complicated world it is: but I still wish I had given something to that child.

I did get away from Sarnath without having to leave behind my clothes and, like St. Francis, flee away naked. On the way back I was entertained by the spectacle of a very small boy, his single garment a very short shirt, herding with great efficiency a strange assortment of buffaloes, cattle, sheep and goats. A mile or so further on I was mystified by the sight of a group of boys, varying in age between eight and twelve, drilling outside a small village school, with long sticks sloped over their shoulders like rifles: and very smart and soldierly they were. I did remember that the Chinese were busy infiltrating over the Himalayas—but no; surely not: surely these boys were rather young. When later, at Banaras, I asked for an explanation of this military display, I was told that they would almost certainly be boy scouts. Scouting has been taken up in India with great enthusiasm but, as with other departments of life, one is sometimes tempted to suspect that there may be rather too much emphasis on externals, on appearances; that the externals may be cultivated at the expense of the essential inner spirit. This thought was suggested with regard to scouts when I once visited a scout camp and was amazed at the meticulous layout, with its officers' headquarters and what not all indicated by the appropriate flags and notices, far surpassing anything I had seen in England. I wondered if they were as good at the basic skills and in their discipline as their façade suggested. I once thought in a cynical moment that if I should ever be asked (I never shall) to compose an inscription for the great arch at Bombay known as the Gateway of India, I could suggest nothing better than the axiom of the Greek philosophers: *σωζεῖν τὰ φαινόμενα* (Preserve the Appearances).

I hope my Indian friends will forgive this: many of them have said the same thing more forcibly. It is not meant to be unkind. 'Face' and the erection of an elaborate façade before one has anything much to put behind it has its roots deep in the Indian mentality and it is something to reckon with in all one's assessments and evaluations. My object in coming to Banaras was to find what lay behind the externals of Indian religion, and especially what lay behind the accounts circulated about it in the West.

One small incident that remains imprinted on my mind is not, I think, without significance for my main theme. As I was

returning from a walk one evening to the church in the cantonment, six tiny children rushed at me crying: 'Picksher, picksher', and holding out both hands placed together palms upwards as Indian children commonly do, no matter how small the object they expect to receive. (It is also impolite to take anything from another with the left hand.) They all looked about the same age, not more than four or five years old, all beaming with pleasure and excitement. I assumed that they were Catholic children who recognized me as a priest in my monastic habit, and wanted what European children call 'holy pictures', that is, small pictures, preferably coloured, of Our Lord or the saints. I was sorry to have to disappoint them, but unfortunately I had no such pictures with me. When I mentioned this little incident to my hosts, they told me the children were not Christians: there were no Christian children of this social class living near; all the children of the district had a positive thirst for 'holy pictures' and were always asking for them. I expect such small children as these were primarily interested in acquiring a pretty picture and in fact anything new or unusual, but such pictures may in fact be treasured and put up in the house for veneration. I might add that this thirst for 'holy pictures' is not confined to Indian children: European children also ask for them, though I suspect it is sometimes only part of a temporary craze for collecting things. I remember the teen-age daughter of some friends of mine, home for the holidays from an expensive convent school, saying: 'Have you got any H.P.s?' I said: 'What on earth are H.P.s?' The young lady replied: 'Why, holy pictures, of course; didn't you know? We always call them H.P.s at school.'

This readiness of the Hindu to include Christ and the saints in his own pantheon presents a problem to the Catholic clergy; in some ways it is more difficult to meet than active opposition. The issue emerges very clearly from an incident narrated to me by a well-known Bombay priest (an Indian). A Hindu asked him for a small statue of Our Lord. (He could easily have bought one from a shop, but this would not have been the same as receiving it from a priest, and he obviously wanted a blessing on it.) The priest knew, or suspected, that the man wanted this to add to a collection of statues and pictures of Hindu divinities, to which he would offer *puja* singly or collectively.

The basic idea, no doubt, was to placate any spiritual power that might affect one's life; should a new one be discovered or suspected to exist, it should be included in one's devotions; it is best to be on the safe side. The priest hesitated, and in the end refused. He felt that to do this would be equivalent to an admission that Christ was only one of a whole series of incarnations or manifestations of God, on the same level as all the rest. He objected that he could not give a statue to be placed together with one of Shiva, Krishna, Ganesh and the rest and venerated on the same level: 'Do you believe that cow is God?' 'Yes.' 'Do you believe this monkey is God?' 'Yes.' 'Do you believe this coconut is God?' 'Yes.' 'Well, we don't; we believe that Christ is God, but we don't believe that all these other things are and I can't encourage you to worship all on the same level as though they were all equally God.' I think the priest left the matter there, but of course to leave it there is to avoid what is perhaps the greatest crux in the reconciliation of Hinduism and Christianity. It is possible to find in Christian authors of the first ages equally emphatic declarations that all things *are* God, but in a context that distinguishes this very clearly from the sense in which Christ is God. I put the same questions to a highly-educated swami in the Himalayas and received exactly the same answers, but I was able to draw from him 'distinctions' that could have made his position acceptable to a Christian. I too shall leave it there for the moment, intending to return to it later.[1]

HINDU MONASTERY: MUMUKSHU BHAWAN

Perhaps the highlight of my stay at Banaras was my visit to Mumukshu Bhawan, a monastery, or *mutt*, to use the Indian term, of Hindu sannyasis. This had been recommended to me as a specially good one from which I could get an idea of a Hindu monastery of good observance. On the face of it this might have been the place where one would expect to find a true yogi, were it not for the fact that the one who recommended it was the priest who told me that, search as I might, I should not find a yogi. However, I decided to see what I could see.

Having made my way one morning to the district where I

[1] P. 203.

knew the monastery to be, in the suburbs of Banaras, I saved further time by engaging a rickshaw. The driver knew the place and took me there in a few minutes. The approach was through the usual squalid side-streets, yet the monastery itself covered a larger area than one might have supposed from the built-up appearance of the locality. I disembarked at the entrance, a fairly large gateway, paid off the driver, and then began what I can only truthfully describe as a bit of gate-crashing. I had been given the name of a monk or swami who spoke English, known to my friend in Poona, but I had no regular introduction to anyone.

I walked in through the gateway and found myself in an open courtyard. The approach, the entrance, the buildings I saw on entering and those I was to see later presented the neglected, unkempt appearance to which I had by now become accustomed. Such buildings never seem to be painted or to receive any other regular maintenance, though paint is comparatively cheap and labour cheaper still. I am not suggesting that undue importance should be attached to this; it was, in any case, no worse and no better than many Christian establishments of a similar kind in India, and even in some parts of Europe. I feel obliged to mention it as something that always worried me a little, so that sometimes I would have given anything to get my hands on a few mops and brushes and start a general clean-up.

The only things that had been newly whitewashed, as I found later, were little stone cupboards about eighteen inches square, jutting out from the wall of the cloister in front of each monk's cell, Since this was in such striking contrast to the complete lack of fresh paint elsewhere I was curious enough to ask what these erections were. I was told: 'It is where the latrines are kept.' In other words they contained the vessels used by each monk for the necessities of nature. (There was, of course, no regular sanitary system: water came from a well.) The swami explained that these vessels must not be touched except when in use; so they are stowed away. There was no embarrassment on either side. I knew that according to the strict Hindu code there was a regular elaborate ritual for this operation, but I felt it was not a suitable topic of conversation to develop. The temple, when I reached it later, seemed better cared for than

the average, and the attendant priest, although (or perhaps because) I made no attempt to enter, was very friendly and affable. This is, as I have said, regarded as a good monastery, well-known, and some if its members, I found, teach at the Banaras Hindu University.

Just inside the entrance I found a small group of young men standing or leaning about chatting. Opposite them, on the right as one enters, was a building resembling a temple in its architecture. Arranged outside was a little row of sandals and the sound of voices chanting came through the open door. I assumed that it was a temple. In fact it turned out to be a school of Sanskrit and Vedic Literature (perhaps the nearest Indian equivalent to Oxford 'Greats'), and the voices were those of students reciting their lesson (one early Vedic writer likens it to the croaking of frogs). I enquired of the young men outside if any of them spoke English, and one of them went inside to find an interpreter. They were all very friendly and helpful. It appeared that this was a school for 25 young men of undergraduate type, who received instruction with board and lodging free from the monks. There was no explicit understanding that they should become monks (I asked about this later) though some of them might do so.

The English-speaking student who took charge of me told me that the swami (monk) I was seeking was out, but would be back by eleven o'clock. Possibly my face registered a little disappointment at this, for it was now barely nine o'clock and I should thus have a wait of two hours and perhaps also encroach on their lunch-time. In any case he disappeared, and returned soon to say that the swami would be here 'in a few minutes; immediately'. The Oriental, I have noticed, is like the Celt in such matters; always willing to accommodate space and time to the temperament of the individual and, like the Celt, his assessments of time or distance are not to be pressed unduly. In fact I met the monk I was looking for about ten o'clock, which was, after all, meeting things half-way. In the meantime there was a little coming and going. It seemed there had been some misunderstanding; the swami I had asked to see did not speak English, but there was one who did, and it was he I was now waiting for. Perhaps this shortage of English-speaking sadhus or swamis calls for a word of explanation. Educated people in

India nearly always speak English as well as their own Indian dialect (or, more correctly, language). The fact that the swami of the traditional type does not is linked with the wider question of his relationship to the rest of the educated class of Indian.

I was told several times by Indians, without any cue from me, that sadhus as a class were hated and despised by educated Indians, and that if Christian priests and monks, in an effort towards 'adaptation', adopted their dress and way of life in externals, they too would lose all their present prestige. I should think this was substantially correct, though it does call for some qualification. I was also told that: (*a*) Hinduism and Indian non-Christian religion in general was in process of dissolution; (*b*) Hinduism was never more flourishing; it had taken a new lease of life since independence; as for religion in general: witness the enormous numbers that still go on pilgrimage to shrines of recently dead 'holy men'. A full treatment of this question would obviously require a volume to itself, and this could be done only after a thorough investigation. My own observations on what I saw during this limited time are as follows.

The sadhu represents the old, conservative, religious India. I use the word sadhu, 'holy man', here and throughout as a general term to include swamis, sannyasis, yogis, bhikshus and all 'professional' religious men. Perhaps in a way it is not quite fair to call them holy men in parentheses with its suggestion that they are fakes, or that they themselves claim to be holy. After all, the Irish peasant commonly refers to a monk or friar as a 'holy father', but I have never met one who considered himself at all holy. Still it is sometimes necessary to use the parenthesis almost as a question mark. The language of the sadhu is still his own dialect and the Sanskrit of his sacred books; he has no use for western ways, western languages or western material progress. An exception to this is the modern Hindu missionary movement which I shall speak of later. The educated Indian, on the contrary, is fired with enthusiasm for transplanting to India all the material benefits and fashions of the West, to 'catch up with' the West in every way in just those things which are to the sadhu maya and illusion.

I think this is true in so far as any generalization can be true. There could hardly be a more direct opposition between two

mentalities. Whether Hinduism, and non-Christian religion in general, is losing ground or advancing is not so clear. I shall have something to say about this later as arising from my later experiences. For the moment I would say that Hinduism in the cities and big towns is weakening under the impact of the materialist spirit of the West which has been imported along with material progress, except where there are vested interests and to the extent that outward conformity may in some circumstances be an assertion of national independence or superiority. A minister of the Uttar Pradesh (United Provinces) Government told me he thought there was less contemplative religious spirit in India since independence; people are now too interested in material progress and in making money. In the villages religion is probably as strong as it ever was. It must, however, be realized that this, so far as its external manifestation is concerned, is a matter of immemorial tradition, the performance of certain rites; it has no universally accepted doctrine as its basis, or a central authority. (The Vedic literature, as we have seen, is open to whatever interpretation men like to place on it.) It remains to be seen how such a religion will stand up to the industrialization and universal education which is the aim of the rulers, with its inevitable disruption of the present pattern of village life. It would probably not withstand an intensive Communist propaganda, still less a thorough-going Communist government. In the meantime there are two developments which may either provide the answer or, as seems more likely, lead to the gradual disintegration of Hinduism in practice.

The first of these, of which I shall say more later,[1] consists in attempts at what the French call the 'vulgarization' of Hinduism. With the spread of education and increased contact with the West is arising the need for *apologetics*, the explanation and interpretation of Hinduism in western categories. The mode of procedure is the reverse of the Christian way; it involves starting from the top and bringing it down to earth, incorporating it in a medium, language, which is, on its own hypothesis, illusion. The Christian starts from a religion that has already been brought down to earth and incorporated in material forms which both contain the unseen Reality and are at the same time

[1] P. 242 and p. 299.

a valid, while admittedly limited and inadequate, revelation of it, and though spiritual realization consists in limitless progress beyond the material symbols, the validity of these always remains. It will be interesting to see how far this 'vulgarization' of Hinduism goes. As we shall see it is connected with the Hindu missionary movement.

The second development, not entirely unconnected with the first, is the present tendency of sadhus to acquire 'respectability' and some degree of official recognition in the newly independent State. A *Bharat Sadhu Samaj* (Indian Sadhu Association) has recently been formed which is to have a central headquarters within the diplomatic enclave at New Delhi and is to cost five lakhs of rupees.[1] It has received the blessing of the President of India. What some Indian critics regard as the more sinister side of this is the tendency of the State—so it is said and hinted in the press—to harness religion for its own purposes. So far as it goes at present this is harmless enough, but we of the West have many reasons to feel uneasy when a state, no matter how paternal, begins to develop too keen an interest in religion. So for instance the *Times of India* (October 4th, 1959) carried an article entitled 'A New Role for Sadhus—Preaching the Gospel of Modernism' in which it speculates on the congruity, or incongruity, of enlisting sadhus, in their wandering through the length and breadth of India, to 'serve as messengers' in the service of 'socio-economic reform—from co-operation and family planning to salvation of the soul'.

The same newspaper a week earlier made heavy play in its principal leader with a report that a train called the *Character-Building Pilgrim Special* had left New Delhi a few days earlier carrying fifty sadhus on an eighty-five day, 9,500 mile tour of the country, scheduled to stop at 'ninety important places' in order to assist in 'building the character of the nation'. With that heavy sarcasm and truculence to which the Indian press is liable it demands to know: (1) 'Who is at the bottom of this—Who is putting up the cash?' (2) In what sense are the 'ninety important places' important? In the sense that they now have the least character, and so it is desirable to give them some, or in the sense that 'dwellers in important places are naturally assumed to be deficient in character content' and have become import-

[1] *Times of India*, 4th October 1959.

ant in spite of this? (or perhaps because of it?—there could be a point here which has escaped the notice of the editor). (3) '. . . rather important: What exactly are the ingredients of "character" in the view of the scheme's sponsors?' The leader goes on to suggest: discipline, tolerance, humility, diligence, hard work, and strikes them out one by one: apparently the poor sadhu has none of them. '. . . the scene on the Delhi station as the *Character-Building Pilgrimage Special* (we just *love* the name) stood waiting for its holy cargo was an unrivalled example of chaotic indiscipline' . . . and so on.

Admittedly the *Times of India* is not the kind of paper that is likely to have much truck with sadhus, but this editorial does undoubtedly reflect a fairly widespread attitude to them. It must be seen in its true perspective; monks, sadhus, sannyasis of any race or climate never have been tremendously popular with the progressives, in whatever direction they may be progressing. The number of sadhus in India is not known. There was a proposal a few years ago to take a census of them and compel them to register, but since most of them have no fixed abode it was soon realized that this would be impracticable. There is certainly a vast number. There is at present no central authority with powers of censure, excommunication, or other sanction, and so large a body of men will inevitably vary much in quality; some certainly are only beggars in disguise or fugitives from justice, or open profligates. It is necessary to state the existence of the prejudice against them by at least a large section of the influential educated class. To what extent this is counterbalanced by the esteem of the vastly larger poor and illiterate body I would not like to suggest without further investigation; but history suggests that it is the city that sets the pace and the country district that follows.

Here then was I, sitting and standing, awaiting a swamiji who could speak English, since none of the others could and probably took a certain pride in not being able to. While I was waiting the English-speaking student took me into what seemed to be the combined dormitory and living-room of the students. Here again it was impossible not to notice the unkempt, untidy and generally squalid appearance of the place. The beds—for, rather surprisingly, there were beds—were propped up in various ways and had a variety of grubby, untidy covers, on

one of which I sat, since there were no chairs, with a little (I hope concealed) misgiving. We chatted. Again the appearance of this place must be seen in the general context of Indian life. It was pretty normal. I was once taken to see the dormitory of a Christian orphanage, run by nuns, in the compound that contained cathedral and bishop's house (an orphanage is an invariable part of such an establishment). Being then comparatively inexperienced I was taken aback to find this lofty, long room, with stone or cement floor, completely empty except for a few, very few, little bundles of wrappings lying on the floor. There were no beds and little or no bedding. Yet the children were happy, adequately clothed, fairly well nourished, clean, free from disease, and certainly living at a higher level than the poor of the district. These students with their rickety beds were perhaps one step higher.

I was happy in the swami to whom I was finally introduced. He was a tall, spare, well-built man, grey-haired and elderly, with a rather thin face and kindly expression, wearing round, steel-rimmed glasses that did not seem to suit him very well, since he had a tendency to raise his head and look at me underneath them. I broke the ice by explaining that I too was a kind of sannyasi, a Christian sannyasi (I must have looked a terribly prosperous one by his standard), that I had lived a very simple kind of eremitical life in a lonely island off the west coast of Scotland for some years, and that I was now travelling in order to learn something of his form of life. This established a certain link between us: it was a kind of life he could appreciate as being in his own tradition; he was interested and we commenced to compare notes. He brought from his cell a small mat and spread it on the ground for me; he himself sat on the ground without one: perhaps it was the only one he had. I shall not attempt to relate the whole of the conversation, but merely give the salient points and more particularly those that led up to the principal reason for my visit, the quest for a yogi. Perhaps I might find one there: at least they surely could tell me where to find one, if there was one to be found—but it was a matter to be led up to slowly.

This swami was a native of Madras and had come to Banaras hoping to end his days there, in the belief already alluded to that all who die in the sacred city escape the wheel of rebirth

and go straight to nirvana: 'All who die in Kashi,' he told me, 'are reborn no more, but go straight to nirvana—men, animals, down to ants.' He seemed comparatively well-read; he knew something of English customs and English geography. He had probably been to an English-speaking school, of which there are many in Madras; most likely a mission school. He spoke with a simple vigour and enthusiasm and there was a sincerity about him that appealed to me. I also thought I sensed, as he showed me round later, that he stood just a little apart from his brethren (he was, of course, a comparative newcomer to this ashram) and this had a certain advantage for my purpose, as likely to give him a more objective judgement.

He explained to me that in a monastery of this kind there is no written rule or uniform observance. (There are in Mount Athos also communities of Christian—Greek Orthodox—'idiorhythmic' monks, monks, that is, with their own individual 'rhythm' or way of life.) Basically it is a master or teacher—a guru—around whom a group of disciples has gathered. One who wishes to attain to 'realization', enlightenment, salvation, seeks out a guru or spiritual director, one who has himself attained to realization, who may, or may not, receive him. Once accepted the disciple must give complete, implicit obedience to his guru, and the guru, for his part, accepts full responsibility for his disciple, including all his sins and failings.[1] In a system where everything 'is God' it would be otiose to say that for the disciple his guru 'is God'; perhaps it would be most nearly correct to say that *for him* his guru is in a special way God. Consequently, wherever he may be the disciple must consider himself to be in the presence of his guru and bound to him in reverence and obedience. There are numerous stories of gurus knowing what their disciples are doing at a distance, but, like so many stories of this kind, it is generally impossible to verify them. As my mentor expressed it: 'Wherever in the world we may be, even in a foreign country, we must pay respects to guru.' By this I understood him to mean not only

[1] Some gurus do even claim to be able to assume and expiate in their own bodies some of the karma of their disciples. The sufferings of the early martyrs of the Christian Church were sometimes accepted by the Church in lieu of the canonical penalties owing for the sins of others. The principle is continued in the system of *indulgences*.

observance of the guru's precepts, but also physical marks of respect such as a bow or prostration, in the same way that Christian monks today bow or kneel to their abbot. Later I was to see incense offered by monks to the ashes of their dead guru. Later, as we passed the guru's 'ashram', which appeared to be a separate self-contained dwelling, approached through a gate over which a couple of monkeys scampered and capered, he excused himself for a moment on the grounds that he must call in and 'pay respects to guru'.

A single individual may thus attach himself to a guru, who most commonly will be living as a hermit in a remote spot. This may be the beginning of a flow of other disciples; the presence of one or two would tend to attract more with similar aspirations. A certain minimum of organization will be essential from the beginning, and as numbers increase this will tend to assume a fixed form until the result is a monastery such as that in which I then found myself. When the original guru dies he will be succeeded by another, possibly elected.

Christian monasticism followed a similar line of development after the Apostolic Age. We find the Desert Fathers in Egypt accepting disciples who might remain permanently with one father, 'abbot' or guru, or, after experience of one, go off to try another; or even as a set policy go round to one after another to get what they could from each. These 'gurus' also exacted implicit obedience. Permanent groups of disciples around outstanding teachers tended to become permanent settlements and led to the establishment of regular monasteries with a greater or lesser degree of organization, and eventually the formation of a rule of life handed down as the result of experience, in time committed to writing. Such a rule of life was basically a common monastic tradition given a certain individual slant or bias by one or another master, abbot, guru.

Christian monasticism in its fully developed form is known to us of the West principally through the Rule of St. Benedict, compiled in the sixth century, but embodying the quintessence of all earlier monasticism, filled with verbal echoes and undertones of earlier authorities, and by the early Middle Ages accepted in the West as the common Rule for monasteries. Even then it left room for innumerable variations and interpretations by individual abbots. Even in the fully developed

cenobitic monastery envisaged by this rule, the original guru-disciple relationship still remains the basis of the whole fabric. The 'father' (i.e., abbot) of the community is the 'teacher' or 'master' (guru) and the monk is the 'disciple'. It is the master's business to teach and that of the disciple to be subject and to learn. The reciprocal obligations of abbot-monk are as absolute and comprehensive as those of guru-disciple. The monk must give unquestioning obedience; neither body nor soul is in his own power; he may not murmur against his abbot even mentally. The abbot for his part is responsible for all the sins and failings of his monks and will even be called to give an account of them on the day of judgement. Similarly this relationship is shown by external marks of the deepest respect of the monk for his abbot: a throne is set apart for him in church and chapter-house second in dignity only to the altar itself; the monk rises in his presence, remains standing until invited to sit; bows profoundly on approaching, leaving or passing him. Naturally such formal marks of respect vary with national character. Foreigners have noted that Englishmen tend to be a little careless of such formalities in everyday life while unequalled in their observance on formal occasions. (Erasmus noted that Thomas More had all the instincts of politeness while he was sometimes careless of its forms.) It is, however, scarcely possible to over-emphasize the place of St. Benedict's guru or abbot in his scheme of things: he holds for his disciples simply and absolutely 'the place of God'. But there is a difference.

In Christian monasticism a solemn vow of obedience to the Rule under the direction of the abbot, and stability for life in that purpose, has been accepted officially and authoritatively by the Church acting by the explicit authority and commission of God himself. In effect the Church says to the monk: I guarantee that if you obey your rule under the abbot, you will be so guided by God through him to your desired end as though God himself were immediately guiding you: God will be leading you through your rule as administered by your abbot. In the case of the Indian guru and his disciple, as in earlier Christian monasticism, obedience is given as long as the disciple cares to remain. When he chooses, he passes to another guru; the choice is by private judgement—and there is no guarantee.

Here, then, we were on common ground and could understand one another. Benedictine monasticism had developed on identical lines: Benedict had begun as a hermit; assimilated monastic tradition, attained to realization, become a 'true yogi'; a band of disciples had gathered round him; they had been organized as a community; finally their rule of life had been committed to writing. Here there was no written rule. There was a certain traditional framework with latitude for considerable individual variation. The 'programme' of each, as the swami described it, is arranged by the guru, and includes, besides prayer and reading, pilgrimages to surrounding shrines and temples and bathing in the Ganges. As we were speaking there was a regular stream of individual sadhus returning after accomplishing their morning 'programme'. Some of them seemed a little intrigued at the unusual spectacle of this strange Christian monk squatting in discussion with one of their brethren.

There was no regular public temple service, he told me, similar to the Christian choir office centred round the Mass. There is a period of private prayer in the morning—he mentioned 3.30 a.m.—but here too I gathered there was considerable variation; there is also a period in the evening. Asked if meals are taken in common he replied that they were taken in the kitchen—I think this was meant literally as the place where the food was prepared—but that food could be carried to one's individual cell. Later, as we were going round the monastery, I saw a little group sitting on the ground in the open over a bowl of some kind of food. Here again there was obviously not that uniformity that is such a marked feature of Christian communities, at least in the West. So too with silence, insisted on so strongly in Western monasteries; it seemed there was no rule about it, but he did point out to me later one old monk sitting outside his cell, clad in a loin cloth, who never spoke: 'He never talks; he never talks at all.' I hope I do him no injustice, but it did occur to me, looking at him, that this could be just sheer listlessness or the desire to be left in peace by his brethren: obviously I could not know.

Asked about work, thinking especially of manual work, he replied that they did not work: 'Meditation is higher than work.' However, just as there is considerable variation between the

'programmes' of individual sadhus, so too there appears to be a difference between monasteries or ashrams. Comparing this with other institutions I found that some do in fact have estates which they cultivate, perhaps mostly by hired labour. Certainly I had the impression that manual work is not commonly a part of their routine. I did notice as we passed round monks doing chores about their cells, but the whole ménage is so simple and primitive that these could occupy only a very short time. In a word the guru does direct each one individually.

Such individual direction is again part of the Christian tradition. The abbot is repeatedly warned that he must study individual needs and temperaments and 'adapt' himself to each, and though the Rule makes for a much more uniform observance, still within this framework there is also considerable latitude in which a monk is normally guided by his abbot or by another director chosen freely, who is also, of course, in his turn the 'disciple' of the abbot.

The swami told me among other things that only brahmins (the highest or priestly caste) could become sannyasis or sadhus; that others did adopt the dress and go about as sadhus, but they were not genuine sadhus. He also emphasized the fact that celibacy was necessary: 'Only bachelors allowed here; must be bachelors; only those allowed who can be bachelors.' He explained to me the '*dhandam*', which had always puzzled me, the six-foot bamboo staff carried by such sadhus. From the top of it flies a small, triangular saffron pennant and round it, about a couple of feet from the top, is wrapped and fastened with cord a piece of white cotton material. This staff is the distinctive mark of the true brahmin sannyasi and seems to be almost a symbol of his status, for I noticed that my guide, before showing me round, went to his cell to collect his staff and so accompanied me, dhandam in hand, all the way.[1] The most significant part of this is the cotton cloth. It covers the sacred brahmin thread which is taken from the novice and wound round the staff in the ceremony of initiation into the state of sannyasi, that is, when he becomes a monk. This ceremony takes place after eight (in some cases three) days in solitude, after the preparatory period

[1] This is what he told me, but I found that there were other types of swamis, also claiming to be regular, duly-initiated swamis, who did not carry this staff.

of study of the Vedic literature under a guru. He is stripped of his ordinary clothes in a ceremony similar in many ways to the 'clothing' of a Christian monk, stripped of the brahmin thread also which he received on his initiation as a brahmin, and clothed in the saffron of a sadhu. It is such sadhus in their saffron and carrying their staffs who are a common sight on the Indian roads. Less common but still frequently to be met with are a type, usually naked (*naga*),[1] who carry, in place of this staff, a staff with three prongs at the end.

It was not easy to draw the swami into a discussion of distinct, isolated questions in philosophy or religion. The basis of his position, as might be expected, was that apparent differences and contradictions are simply different ways of looking at or speaking of things; ultimately all is one and the One is God. He was especially insistent that all religions are the same, that there was no difference between him and me. 'All religions are true; all the same. There is one God; we all worship the same: Buddha, Jesus Christ—all are one.' It would have been useless to attempt to argue this point; in any case my immediate object was not to argue but to discover his own belief. The attitude, as I have said, seems fundamental to Hinduism: the idea that you can dismiss a thing, differences of creed and the rest, simply by denying its existence. The reverse of the process is the confusion of subjective imagination and desire—'dreams', if you like—with objective reality. Of course we all do it to some extent: close our eyes to something, or bury our heads and pretend things are not there; and we all know wishful thinking. I have already suggested[2] that the attitude does reflect an ultimate truth, namely that the material world does depend on, and in a sense flow from, the spiritual; we shall meet other aspects of this later.

This attitude to religion, as expressed by the swami, is qualified in some degree by the Hindu doctrine of karma:[3] each one has his own path to tread. One approaches God in this way, another in another; one through Shiva, another through Buddha, another through Christ; we all arrive at the same

[1] Not to be confused with the 'Nagas', the hill tribe of North-East India who have recently acquired a measure of independence within the Indian state.

[2] P. 44 ff. [3] P. 57.

destination in the end where all is One. You may start anywhere and move in any direction and you will still arrive. Such, stated crudely, seems to be the idea. The swami did not actually say this; this is my interpretation of what he did say. I have already suggested that this very formlessness of Hinduism is about all that can with certainty be said about it; opposites can be equally true, and at any attempt to define or to grasp a statement it dissolves in one's hands. Other priests who have lived long in India and are also well equipped in philosophical knowledge and have tried to discuss religion or make enquiries have had the same experience: it is impossible in discussion to get any clear definite statement or to tie a debater down to any agreement on a point.

This swami was clearly a man of kindly, humane disposition. I put it to him that Christians would find it a very great loss not to have a God who was a *person,* whom they knew was always present to them at every moment, who had lived as a man (was still man), could sympathize with them, to whom they could speak and ask for guidance and help with the assurance that he would listen and help them.[1] It was this, in fact, that had occasioned the declaration that 'all religions are true', with the implied corollary that Hinduism includes them all. In fact, though he himself did not draw attention to it, modern popular Hinduism does tend to produce a personal god for itself. To Krishna especially have been attributed many of the most striking incidents of the birth and life of Christ. He might have objected that the many incarnations of God, and even one's own guru, fill the role: but he did not.

On the face of it the doctrine of karma is incompatible with the God of Christianity: it is no good crying for mercy if you cannot escape your karma, 'nor all thy tears wash out a word of it'. So too of prayer for oneself or another: this was clearly beyond his comprehension. How could one interfere with the karma of another? Each one has his path to tread and he must follow it to the end. Nothing can alter it. This is closely linked with the matter of caste and a man's career. In theory at least this is decided by karma, the circumstances of birth: there is no escaping it. For the same reason it is inconceivable that a man

[1] The distinctively human characteristics of the Hindu 'gods' are maya, illusion.

should pass from one religion to another: 'as things have been they remain'—at least for this incarnation; there may be something better in store in the next. But even the attempt to define the matter as closely as this is to carry it by that very fact beyond the limits of Hinduism, or rather to give it a limit it does not possess.

This led me to the question of nirvana, moksha, 'liberation' from the 'wheel of rebirth'. I had never believed that it meant to the Hindu (and Buddhist) just personal extinction, the snuffing out of a candle, which seems to be the popular conception of it in the West.[1] There seemed an opportunity here of obtaining an opinion at first hand from one who ought to know. Perhaps I should say here that in the course of my journey I found a general belief in a continued existence after death, but no one was able to give me a clear account of it. Many of the statements were irreconcilable one with another and most of them, taken at their face value, implied only a merging into a universal consciousness, with no separate, conscious, continued existence. Nevertheless I came to the conclusion that nirvana does mean for the Hindu perfect, everlasting happiness, although I could not find anyone to explain to me why or how: and after all it is a vital matter for all of us.

This swami had come to Banaras in the hope of dying there and so escaping rebirth, passing straight to nirvana. It is the reason why so many come here, at least on pilgrimage and, if possible, also to die here. Would he, I asked, when he reached nirvana, have a separate consciousness, a separate continued conscious existence, or would this existence resemble rather that dreamless sleep of which Socrates said at his trial that,

[1] As we have seen the Hindu sacred scripture has received, and still receives, innumerable conflicting interpretations in the three thousand years and more since its compilation. The Rig-Veda does in fact seem to envisage an everlasting happiness for the good in which body as well as soul will share. The soul, on reaching the abode of the fathers, receives a glorious body and is given to drink of the heavenly *soma* which renders it immortal. (It has been suggested (cf. p. 112) that the care taken of the body of the dead indicates a belief in some form of bodily resurrection.) I think the Hindu is more likely to regard it as a figurative description of the final stage in the progressive withdrawal of the one self from the illusions of the body and the world of the body, through the various 'layers', 'sheaths', or planes of existence, but along the same 'lines', in the same 'shape', so to speak; only in a different dimension.

even should there be nothing but this, there are very few days in life one can remember to have passed more pleasantly? He replied: Yes; he would enjoy a continued conscious existence—but he was obviously not inclined to pursue the subject. I had, however, got what I wanted. It was clear that for him nirvana was not just oblivion, annihilation as an individual for all practical purposes, if it means being absorbed into a universal consciousness with no separate existence. Perhaps it was not quite fair to slip in this word 'separate', meaning 'distinct'. I doubt if he really did mean that he would have a separate consciousness. This is hardly compatible with the idea that man *is* God and his realization consists in identity with God, even though the manner of this identity is explained in many ways. Later I asked a swami in the hills, a widely-read man and I think a more subtle mind than this swami, if in the final state there would be any distinction, for instance between him and me: Would he be able to say 'This is I' (or, more likely, 'This is me'), 'and that is you?' He replied immediately: 'No.' I asked a Christian student of Hinduism, a man with an extremely acute mind, whose tendency was to present Hinduism in terms acceptable to the Christian: Did the Hindu look forward to a continued separate conscious existence? He was silent for a moment, then said: 'I'm afraid I can't answer that.' Some hours later he did in fact try to answer it, starting with the assertion that God is by definition 'consciousness' (the scholastic *intellectio sui ipsius*); man, therefore, united to God, one with God, is united to 'consciousness'—ergo. This, it is obvious, evades the crux: whether a distinction remains between God and man, or man is simply absorbed into, identified with God, and loses his *separate* identity (a separate identity which is, of course, in the Hindu view even now an illusion).[1]

[1] The illusion seems to consist not in the fact that phenomena appear to be real but are not, but in thinking that they have any reality apart from God. This could be explained in terms of the scholastic distinction between contingent (dependent) being which the creature is and absolute (independent) Being which is God, and I think this is, properly understood, what the Hindu has in mind though he does seem to deny *any* distinction between God and created being. I discussed this point with a swami of the Ramakrishna Mission, saying that Christian theologians tended to say that Hinduism was pantheist: I explained what pantheism was. He said: 'Yes, that'll suit us,' but when I went on to draw out some of the consequences of this

Another swami, a member of the Ramakrishna Mission, with its message to the whole world and so more anxious than others to accommodate Hinduism as far as possible to Christian thought, said it was like a drop of water falling into the ocean and fearing it would be lost; in fact it found its fulfilment, became one with the sea. I did not find this too cheerful a prospect: Would the very tiny drop that I am retain its identity, or would it cease to exist as a separate drop, be lost in that sense? He would only repeat that it would become one with the sea. I pressed the question, but he could only say his piece. I tried him with the analogy of a drop of water in a glass of wine. To all appearances it becomes wine, so surrounded and enclosed by it that it partakes of the very nature of wine, indistinguishable from it; yet it remains water and, theoretically at least, recoverable: it could be separated out again. But no; this would not do. Not to lose our sense of proportion, we must remember that Christian mystics, while maintaining distinction, do use language suggestive of identity.[1]

This leads to the further question of the place of the body and material world of phenomena in the Hindu nirvana. Is there any place for it? Is there anywhere in the Hindu system anything comparable to the Christian view that in his final perfection (to which some of the saints approximated in this world) man is able to combine uninterrupted perfect contemplation and immobility with intense physical activity in a synthesis where activity is contemplation? Or are the two at opposite poles? Dr. Panikkar, with whom I discussed this question, thought that Hinduism envisaged no continued bodily existence and no stage at which it might be possible to engage in bodily activity about the material world without losing

he thought: No, perhaps that would not do. It is obvious that such distinctions are beyond the ordinary peasant.

[1] The Greek theologians tend to compare the union of man with the divinity to metal in a furnace, so suffused by the light and heat that it becomes indistinguishable from it—you can no longer *see* the metal. It appears to become light and heat, partaking of their nature: it *is* metal which has also become light and heat. In the nature of things no such comparison can be adequate. In this case one might venture to extend it a little by saying that the transforming light and heat are received in the 'shape' or 'pattern' of Christ, of the life of Christ, human and divine, receiving further extension in each individual man. See also p. 203, n. 1, and p. 291, n. 1.

contemplation. This is obviously of vital practical importance for a country which is making immense efforts to industrialize herself: Why; if the only purpose of this world is to get away from it as quickly as possible? However, other people had other views, and we shall come to them later. We have already noticed[1] that there is some reason to suppose there was an earlier belief in the reunion of body and soul, but it is typical that there is no agreement on such fundamental questions.

My swamiji, in the meantime, had no doubts that nirvana would be for him not just a deep, dreamless sleep, but a full complete existence, in fact the whole of existence. I think he did not feel any need of rational arguments or demonstration. He accepted it rather in the spirit in which, for instance, the Eastern Fathers at the Council of Florence maintained their view on the 'processions' in the Trinity, as something handed down by the saints, not a matter to be subjected to the rigours of syllogistic argument after the manner of these tiresome Latins. It is something you *see*; you may, or may not, go on to discuss it and subject it to analysis, but it will remain above and beyond reason. If your manuscripts happen to be faulty, that is just too bad.

It was at this point, when we were speaking freely and frankly, that I raised my question of the 'true yogi': Did he know anyone who had attained to full realization or was at least well advanced on the way to it; one who had passed through the stages outlined by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutra*, and acquired the siddhis, the preternatural powers enumerated there (I recalled some of them)? The answer came quite unhesitatingly: 'No.' It was obviously something quite outside his experience and, I should say, also beyond his theoretical consideration. I am quite sure he was honest about this and not just trying to hide anything from me; and this was confirmed by what followed. Was there no one in the monastery who had reached this stage and had these powers? Again unhesitatingly: 'No.' Did he know of anyone in the Himalayas or elsewhere who might possess these powers, or of anyone who might direct me to someone who

[1] P. 152, n. 1. *Avatars,* divine incarnations or fully 'realized' beings who yet remain in, or return to, the world of phenomena in bodily form to assist in the salvation of others (cf. e.g., p. 284), are not really an exception since such incarnations are envisaged as only temporary states.

had them? No; in any case I could not go to the Himalayas in winter. (I had already been told in Poona that I could not, or at least should not, go to the Himalayas in winter, but varied experience has shown that a surprising number of things that cannot be done in fact can be.)

We had come nearly to the end of our discussion; I felt I could not in decency take up any more of his time, and for the moment there was nothing more I could learn here bearing directly on my quest. He offered to show me round the monastery before I left and, as I have mentioned, went first to his cell for his dhandam, as his wand of office, so to speak, the mark of a true swami. There were two other community quadrangles or 'cloister garths' similar to the one in which we were seated, each surrounded by small 'cells', with a verandah running round the whole. There were perhaps eight cells on each of the four sides, which would allow for a community of about one hundred monks.

The sadhus we saw were variously engaged: squatting or lying, reading singly or sitting together in groups apparently in discussion, doing odd jobs about their cells. All to whom I was introduced were friendly and returned my greeting (hands joined together and raised to the level of the face), with the exception of one little group who motioned to my swami to move on. The one given to perpetual silence continued to sit at the door of his cell, glancing at me but saying nothing: 'He never speaks.'

Apart from the generally unkempt appearance of the place, the general impression given was of a community of men much like the run of religious communities anywhere, containing sincere, earnest men, with an admixture of some not so sincere, and a few cranks. I should be surprised to find it was run by a superior of eminent sanctity, but on such a passing glimpse it would be unfair to say this could not be so.

One thought did strike me very forcibly on this little tour: the obvious impossibility, even for Orientals, in a community that explicitly rejects work, of passing the whole day in continual prayer and contemplation. This was a matter that had occupied my mind for many years. Christian monasteries and convents that are described as 'purely contemplative' are not so in the sense that all the day is spent in direct contemplation

in the usual sense of the word as divorced from action; they commonly do a wide variety of work for a considerable part of the day. Some are even over-active within their own enclosure. Where regular organized work is wanting the time tends to be filled in with specified vocal prayers, or else nothing very much happens in the intervals between public choir office and private spiritual duties. 'They just potter about' was the description given me by one who was rather at a loss to explain what monks of a particular community did in the intervals of choir office and other duties. I have the impression that in Hindu communities such as this there is a fair amount of 'just pottering about'. The point is that in a well-ordered Christian monastery the community are not involved the whole day in contemplation to the exclusion of work, though ideally this work too should become part of their contemplation.

As we went round my guide asked one after another of the sadhus we met if they knew anyone who had attained to the exercise of Patanjali's siddhis. None of them did know; further, it became clear to me from their manner of saying so that this was a matter quite beyond their horizon. The last sadhu we met, introduced as 'the senior pupil of the guru', presumably a kind of second-in-command, even he could not help me, and shook his head slowly in a manner indicating complete ignorance of such matters. An idea then seemed to occur to him as we were going away. He called back my swami and spoke to him. 'Tell him,' he said, 'to try Clarke's Hotel; they have guides who may be able to lead him to someone.'

Now this, the reader may think, could have been just sarcasm. It could have been, but I am sure it was not. I can recognize sarcasm as easily as the next man and I am sure this was not it. He wanted to be helpful and this was the best suggestion he could make. In any case one thing was quite clear: Patanjali's siddhis, if not his final stage of 'liberation' or 'realization', just did not enter within his vision or mental horizon. It was not so much that he did not know anyone with these powers as that the whole idea that he might be expected to was quite novel to him. Such things might not unnaturally interest rubber-necked tourists, and in that case surely Clarke's Hotel would have it all laid on: but it was outside his range.

'Clarke's Hotel, Western Style. Fully Air-Conditioned'—the

announcement meets you at the railway station—is one of two large hotels standing nearly opposite one another in the cantonment area on a quiet road less than a mile from the Catholic Mission. Shaded lights, waiters in 'tails', soft music, masses of flowers, good food and wine—and 'fully air-conditioned', which is something in Banaras in the summer. I had in fact already visited Clarke's, not in search of creature comforts, of which my French-Canadian hosts provided all I needed, but in order to see an exhibition of the brocades for which Banaras is famous. Some of them would have made beautiful altar hangings, though colours and designs tend to look very different in a western setting; they were, however, far too expensive for me. I do not doubt the efficiency of Clarke's Hotel; I am sure they could produce an Indian rope-trick or two, or a lightning-growing mango tree, if one were prepared to foot the bill; I doubt if they could provide a reliable guide to the higher spirituality at any price. I asked my guide to convey this to the 'senior pupil' and to thank him.

The conclusion seemed to be that this *mutt*, recommended as a specially good, observant one, knew nothing of such matters, had no practical experience of them (and apparently saw no reason why it should have), and was unable to direct me to anyone who had. I am sure there was no conspiracy of silence. This is, in any case, not the Indian manner, as appears from what has already been related. To keep secret the means of producing the effect; yes. Not to divulge a secret teaching which may be used for unworthy ends; perhaps, though all this is available now in print, at least as to general principles. To conceal the effect, the marvel; no. Popular books on yoga and yogis—there is one such before me now as I write—are crammed with such marvels, giving the impression that they are an everyday occurrence to be met with almost anywhere.

It was when I was taking my leave of the swami who had given me so much of his time and answered all my questions, pertinent and impertinent, so freely that he made a remark that did startle me a little and still gives me food for thought. Whether it was just a lucky hit, sheer coincidence (if there is such a thing); whether he had been indulging in a little character-reading, or by St. Thomas's 'angelic locution' he had read the thoughts of my mind which were open to him

to be read, I cannot tell. I had not discussed myself in any direct way. I said jokingly to him that since he had instructed me in spiritual matters he was now my guru. He was silent for a moment, as well he might be; it would be a very rash guru who should accept me as a disciple. Then he said, suddenly and unhesitatingly: 'St. Michael is your guru; St. Michael who appeared to Joan of Arc in a blaze of light.'

This was so unexpected that for a moment I had no answer to it, and then, when words might have come, it seemed so very final and satisfactory that there was really nothing adequate one could say; comment could only have been an anticlimax. So I thanked him again; we exchanged the usual Indian greeting, bowed, and parted.

I went away wondering, and I have many times since pondered on it. Why St. Michael? The Benedictine motto is commonly taken to be *Pax* (peace). Why such a warlike guru? It was, in any case, rather surprising that he knew of St. Michael, still more that he knew the history of St. Joan. He had not shown any detailed knowledge of Christian tradition or of English and French history. Now it happens that I always have been attracted by Michael the Archangel, leader of the hosts of heaven; and this in spite of the Renaissance paintings of him (or should it be her?). Moreover in our English Benedictine Congregation the Feast of Michael the Archangel (September 29th) has received a certain prominence from the fact that it was for long the traditional day for novices to receive the monastic habit. Besides being a convenient day for other reasons there is a certain appropriateness about it from the fact that the life of a monk in the Rule and the ceremony of the clothing is several times spoken of in terms of warfare and in military language. What more appropriate, then, than to begin it under the aegis of the leader of the hosts of heaven?

But my swami could hardly have known anything of this. Nor, knowing nothing of me personally, could he be suspected of 'taking a dig' at me. On my own assessment I have always tried to 'seek peace and pursue it', and I have certainly never gone about trailing my coat or otherwise looking for trouble. However, reviewing the matter quite dispassionately, I had to admit to myself that both my friends and my enemies had come to think of me in rather different terms. I remembered rather

uneasily that I had once been asked by one who certainly considered himself my friend whether it was true that I went about fighting generals. This had been to me a startling description of what I had taken to be my peaceful as well as lawful occasions—and there had been other matters. I would like to think I had always been on the side of the angels; but one never knows. St. Michael was my guru, was he? My swamiji can have known nothing of all this. Or did he? Had he said St. Benedict I could have understood it. He knew I was a Benedictine monk who followed St. Benedict's Rule, admittedly with some deviations; he probably knew something of St. Benedict and the Western monastic tradition; in this sense, and especially in his own tradition, St. Benedict might be considered my guru. But no; Michael is my guru; Michael who appeared to Joan of Arc in a blaze of light. Very, well, then; Michael is my guru: I shall not complain.

'TALES, MARVELLOUS TALES'

It might seem that we are taking a rather undue time to reach the Himalayas. Should that thought arise then it would be well to remember that in the mentality this book is trying to present all this is already the Himalayas, the manifestation in material form of the unseen spirit that dwells there. It is its connection with this spirit that is the source of its reality; cut off from it all is maya and illusion. The sacred river that rises in the solitude of the hills has expanded at this point into a mighty flood. The extent of time and space to be covered in exploring its reaches is necessarily greater than that required at its source. But since it is our nature to proceed in this way from appearances to the inner reality, this method has the advantage in this case of preparing us gradually for what we shall find. With so much of an apology perhaps it may be permitted to make still another brief halt in order to view this last episode in its right perspective.

To one nurtured on tales of the mysterious and marvellous East, and in particular on the descriptions of yogic powers prepared especially for western consumption, the comparative ignorance and almost complete lack of interest shown by this (above the average) Hindu monastic community in the marvels

promised by Patanjali might seem surprising. The truth seems to be that, allowance being made for the greater exuberance of the eastern imagination and style of writing, such marvels occupy a hardly noticeably greater place in Hindu religion than they do in Christianity; perhaps, to be quite accurate, one should say than they do in the Christian Eastern Church. The Greek and Russian Church tends, for instance, to pay more attention to the marvellous than the Latin. For the former the *charismata* and strictly miraculous divine intervention in the ordinary course of human affairs is something to be hoped for and expected as liable to happen, not perhaps every day but certainly not infrequently. For the latter the marvellous is something to be approached with reserve, as not done and perhaps hardly respectable, generally to be looked at askance and nearly always as something rather too good to be true: miracles may happen and do happen, but it is not expected that they will happen very often, and they might never happen to you or me. It is obviously with the Eastern Church that non-Christian eastern religion should be compared.

It happened—and I have become accustomed to such happenings when engaged on work of this kind—that while I was writing these last two or three pages I was shown by a young monk a copy of a work called: *Philokalia or Prayer of the Heart*[1] with a request for an opinion on it: was it doctrinally sound and could it be safely followed in practice? This work, translated into English from a Russian translation of the original Greek, is a collection of extracts from the writings of Greek Christian spiritual writers from the fourth century onwards. It is designed to foster contemplation of, or union with, God (yoga, that is) through the 'Jesus Prayer', a short ejaculatory prayer containing the Holy Name, gradually made so habitual through being linked with the rhythm of breathing that it becomes unceasing, almost part of the physical constitution of the devotee. The parallel between this and certain

[1] E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. Palmer (Faber and Faber, 1951). As Kundalini Yoga sums up the whole process of realization as an awakening of kundalini, the fundamental energy in man, similarly this work (Introduction, pp. 5–6) declares its aim as the 'awakening of the attention and consciousness', and the 'development of consciousness'.

yogic practices will be immediately evident: control of the breathing so that every breath is literally a prayer; the restoration by this means of a lost harmony and rhythm; the gathering together of all the forces and the concentration of them on God; perhaps at its deepest level the harnessing of the subconscious and the sympathetic nervous system in the sense that this too is taken over by a continuous aspiration to union with God, so that all stages of human activity from the subconscious to the fully conscious act become one single operation. It should not be necessary to add that this is accompanied by an intense cultivation of the moral virtues and a regular discipline of solitude, silence and in general withdrawal from the external world.

That is by the way. The one point to which I wish to draw attention here is that the end of this process, union, yoga, realization, enlightenment, by whatever name one may call it, is described in terms very similar to, and *essentially* identical with, those of Patanjali. Those who persevere in it, will be 'able in the end to see the light of their mind'. This 'light' is also for the yogi, it will be remembered, the source of all his powers.[1] The Hindu schools tend to speak of light as the ultimate source of all things, but it should be noted that they have in mind the physical phenomenon while Christian writers use the word analogically. Yet this is not a fair description of the Hindu position unless we remember that the physical manifestation is illusion in so far as it is physical; it is a way we have of looking at the unseen light, our reception of the 'vibrations' or 'energy' which is the ultimate source of all things.[2]

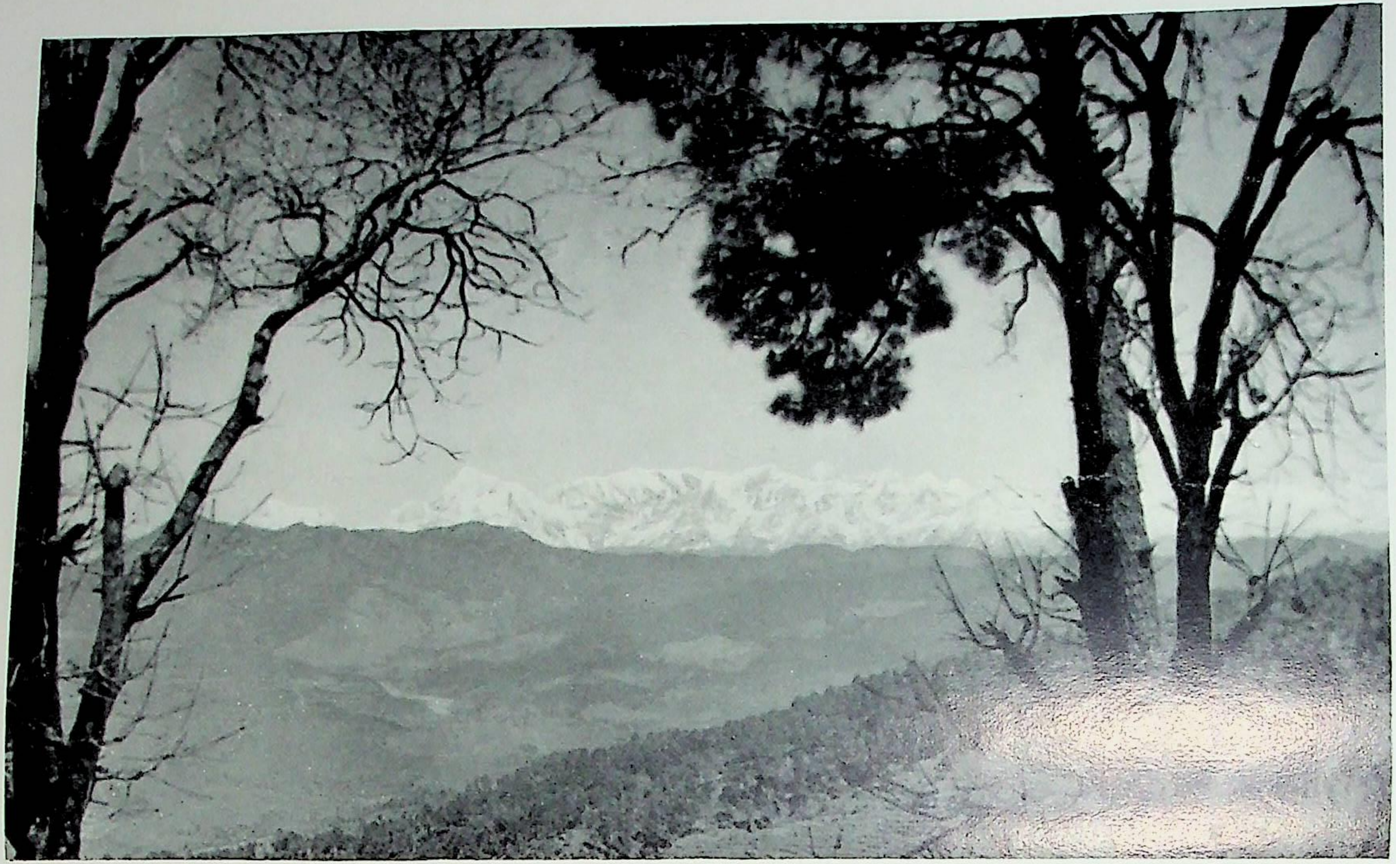
The result for the Christian of perseverance in the doctrine of *philokalia* will be the ability 'to look beyond the limits of the senses', access to 'all lofty and angelic manner of life and disposition', the power 'spiritually to reason, judge, see, foresee and

[1] Cf. p. 39.

[2] Appearing 'in a blaze of light' is sometimes spoken of as the stage in the evolution of the yogi immediately preceding his final realization, 'liberation', 'isolation', presumably considered as his *contact* with the light, the point at which he is dissolved into and reappears from it. Modern Hindu writers tend to appeal to Einstein's theory of relativity with the speed of light as the one constant factor in the universe, with—typically—the suggestion that this was developed from yoga, or at least that the theory already existed in yoga.



12. Gangotri. Reputed source of the Ganges, snow-bound in winter. Small temple may be seen in centre.



13. Himalayan Peaks seen from Ranikhet (p. 190). Nanda Devi, the highest of the peaks shown, is 25,660 ft.

the like . . .[1] all showing and revelation of unknown mysteries shines forth for them'. The power given them 'renders their flesh lighter or rather finer and makes them soar on high like a meteor. By this power of light in the Holy Spirit some of the holy fathers while still in their bodies traversed wide rivers and deep seas dry-footed as though immaterial and incorporeal. They covered in a moment great distances requiring many days of travel and performed many other marvellous deeds in heaven, on earth, in the sun, on the seas, in deserts, in cities, in every place and country, in beasts and reptiles and generally in every creature and every element—they were glorified. When they stood at prayer their holy and precious bodies were lifted off the ground as though on wings; after death they remained uncorrupted and performed signs and miracles . . .'

The *general* agreement of this with the siddhis of Patanjali, to be attained by the yogi in the course of his progress towards realization, is apparent at once; they are describing the same thing. Now if it is expected that the Hindu monks of Banaras should know all about the siddhis of Patanjali, it should by the same token be expected that Christian monks, who are solemnly pledged to devote their lives to the pursuit of yoga or union with God (and even many who are not monks, including the numerous mere seekers after the marvellous), would know of the existence of this passage. Yet I am sure that there is only a very small percentage of monks who have ever heard of it. From what I know of my own community I would say it is at least probable that only the monk who showed me the book had, in this community, ever seen it. Yet it is included in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* which stands, handsomely bound, on the library shelves. Go and search round all the Christian monasteries of Great Britain, of Europe for that matter, as I sought in India, for one who has seen any of these marvellous deeds performed, and it is most unlikely that you will find anyone. It is hardly more likely that you will find anyone who can direct you to one who is known commonly to perform such

[1] The Christian tradition concerning the powers of pure spirits ('angels') is to be found in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas, I, Q. 50 ff., developed from the Pseudo-Denys. This should be compared with the powers of man before the Fall, I, Q. 94, and with the principal questions on 'contemplation', II, II, Q. 80 and Q. 180. Cf. also p. 48.

feats except for the unexplained phenomena in the case of a few well-known people such as Theresa Neumann and Padre Pio, which are insignificant compared with those related above. Yet the impression given by the passage quoted is that such incidents are, or at least once were, comparatively common. There are rare instances of the exercise of one or other of these powers recorded in the lives of the saints. Some of them are well attested, but far more are of very doubtful authenticity. In any case they are very rare, and monks and clergy are in general a sceptical race. The unseen is the greater reality for them and for that reason they tend to suspect any suggestion that their faith needs bolstering by any extraordinary divine intervention.

To obtain a true perspective it might be useful to consider a particular case. In this matter of walking on water, 'wide rivers and deep seas' be it noted, it is related by so considerable a personage as Pope Gregory the Great that Maurus, the elder of St. Benedict's first two boy pupils, ran over the surface of a lake on the shore of which the monastery was built. This was attributed to the power of St. Benedict rather than of the boy. Maurus had, at the command of Benedict, run to the assistance of the smaller boy, Placid, who in drawing water had dropped his pitcher into the lake, tumbled in after it and, having been carried 'a bowshot' from the bank, was in danger of drowning. The moral suggested is that the older boy had been so intent on doing exactly what he was told that he continued running when he came to the lake, not even realizing until afterwards what he was doing.

The *Roman Martyrology*, announcing the Feast of St. Maurus (for he grew up to become a saint), mentions this feat, adding that it was 'a thing hardly ever done [a delightful phrase—*res pene inusitata*] since the Apostle Peter' who, it will be remembered, also walked on water. Benedict and Maurus lived in the sixth century; the *Roman Martyrology* knows hardly anyone in the five hundred years between Peter and Maurus who walked on water. There may be instances of saints who are alleged to have done it since, but at the moment of writing I cannot recall any; it is certainly not the kind of thing that happens every day. Yet the fifth-century Bishop Diadochus seems to infer that this is one of the powers one may expect

to develop in the ordinary course as a result of an intensive cultivation of the spiritual life and that many men in the first four hundred years or so of the Church's foundation did acquire it. It is most unlikely that if you were to visit today all the Christian monasteries in the world you would find anyone who could direct you to one who could walk on 'wide rivers and deep seas'. It would be just about as unlikely that you would find anyone who thought it of the least importance whether one could or could not. Such powers will certainly be included in those of the 'resurrection body'; how far they may be acquired already in this earthly existence by the development of natural powers, without any extraordinary divine assistance, is still open to demonstration and offers a wide field for scientific research. I use the word 'scientific' deliberately; they are powers concerned with the visible world and to that extent belong to the domain of science rather than of religion. This is the view taken in India, and the authentic yoga school stresses the fact that these powers are natural; preternatural if you will, in the sense that they are unusual, not many people have developed them, but within the natural ability of all, not supernatural.[1] (I shall refer later to the embarrassing profusion of marvels in the more sensational yoga literature and the extent to which such things do happen, if they happen at all: at this stage I am still trying to find them in India.)

In Christian hagiography, thinking of those cases where the exercise of such powers is certain beyond reasonable doubt, it is not always certain that they were miraculous in the strict sense, accomplished, that is, by extraordinary divine aid, and not rather the incidental effect of an intensive Christian asceticism and in particular of a harmony and concentration of the faculties through solitude and silence. The possession of such powers is, in any case, not accepted in the Church as a demonstration of sanctity or of strictly supernatural development, or as opening the way to the supernatural plane. Their widespread possession would moreover be a mixed blessing, since in our present very fallible moral condition they would inevitably be used for evil, or at least selfish, ends. I shall

[1] Always remembering on the one hand the qualification made on p. 48 and on the other hand wondering whether there is room in the yoga system for a transcendent God and a strictly supernatural plane at all.

mention briefly later the Indian 'black art', which is undoubtedly, to my mind, a use of these same powers for evil ends. The practice of the theological and moral virtues to a heroic degree is the only criterion of sanctity; this frequently is accompanied by the beginning of a restoration of some or all of the powers we have spoken of, but by no means is this always so. Anyway at this stage of my enquiry such marvels seemed to be no more common in the East than they are in the West.

I had, then, visited some of the élite of Hinduism; but I had not yet found a yogi or been given one glimpse of the marvellous. As I have said, the monks I had met were, I think, good earnest men, intent on one thing only: salvation by escaping the wheel of rebirth and entering nirvana. No small matter indeed; yet one feels that such a conception falls short of the highest, and provides a degree of justification for Kingsley's taunt of being concerned only for 'their own dirty little souls'. In the conversation just described my swami friend repeatedly emphasized that he and his colleagues had 'no anxieties', 'no ambition', were completely 'free from all worries'. This deserves to be considered since it suggests a radical difference between Hinduism and Christianity.

Is this the highest ideal, to be free from all worries, anxieties, ambitions? Is it even consonant with, not religion but common humanity? Is it possible, not to say desirable, for any human being to be so carefree in a suffering world? Even with the doctrine of karma it surely must be difficult. If by withdrawing from the world and attaining to yoga or union with God one were able to carry the world and the whole human race with one, reuniting it to the source of all reality and happiness, then yes, undoubtedly. Such men would be the great heroes and leaders, pioneers and pathfinders of the human race. This concept is, as is well known, inherent in the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, whereby every action of a single member reacts on the whole organism. One Man who is also God has carried up in himself and united in perfect union the whole world and the whole human race to God. Christ *is* the whole human race and each cell or member of the Body reproduces in a microcosm the whole Body. It would be possible to express this doctrine in terms of Hinduism but no one I met made any attempt to express any such idea, not even the occasional

Hindus I met who had formerly been Christians and must have known something of it. They were in the most literal sense flying from the world in order to attain to nirvana with no thought but for their own souls, 'little' and 'dirty' or not.

Speaking generally, and thinking of Hinduism as rather a mentality and attitude than a body of doctrine, this seems to be one of the most radical differences between it and Christianity. The one is egocentric and seeks to expand itself; the other seeks its centre outside itself, in God, and to reach this it has to go 'out of itself', in 'ecstasy' in the literal sense, through charity, love; and this radical difference is operative at all levels. In the Hindu's theory there is room only for the love of self; even his asceticism and devotion have his own perfection as their end. I say 'theory', because Indians in this are, like the rest of us, not logical; they tend to be instinctively kind and generous and I have mentioned the hordes of beggars that thrive on their (sometimes misplaced) generosity. Patanjali holds out to the yoga devotee the possibility of such expansion through *mahima* or macrocosm, that he can contain within himself the whole universe; the Christian is invited to forget and lose himself, and in proportion as he does so he finds both himself and the whole world—even the desire for perfection is no substitute for charity. As with everything one can say about Hinduism, some qualification is immediately called for if one is to avoid misrepresentation. To the Hindu the swami, you, I, *are* God; there is no real separation of self from others, the *apparent* distinction is simply part of the maya and illusion of earthly existence, so what more logical than this preoccupation with getting away from it all? The resulting *attitude*, however, is not very unlike that of the old Scottish Calvinist woman who, when asked how many were destined to heaven, replied: 'Oh, just me and the minister, and [as an afterthought] I'm not too sure of the minister.'

The Hindu scholar may object that there is a theory of realization or emancipation through *bhakti*, devotion to God, seen especially in the *madhavism* of the thirteenth century. This does not, however, disprove the existence of the general tendency, and the bhakti concept itself seems to have been strengthened through Christian influence. It is hardly possible to doubt that the *madhavi* school, with its God in human form (Vayu the son of Vishnu by Lakshmi), with its 'finding in the

temple', fasting in the Himalayas before beginning his preaching, multiplication of loaves and 'fishing for men', offering salvation to those who unite themselves with him, is based on Christianity. Vayu was, moreover, not 'human' or 'incarnate' in the Christian sense; it is emphasized that his human form was not a real, material one.

This tendency to dissolve humanity into thin air is, as we have seen, in line with the general tendency of Hinduism in so far as that can be defined at all: I did in fact find later a sadhu in the hills who held otherwise. Still, speaking generally,[1] there is in the Hindu system no permanent place for the body or for the world which it inhabits, no conception of any state in which body and soul are in perfect union and there is any place for what we call human affairs and emotions. *Bhakti yoga* is no more than a preparation for a state that transcends it. Yet the desire, and even necessity, of loving someone or something is perhaps the most fundamental factor of existence and finds its full satisfaction in the love of a Person who is both human and divine, transcendent and also immanent, through whom all things are made and have their being. You cannot love a Universal Consciousness, even if you spell it with capital letters. But then Hinduism does not expect that you should.[2]

[1] Cf. p. 152 and footnote.

[2] Even in the Christian scheme of things it is, of course, the being and beauty of God reflected in a particular person or thing that is ultimately the object of man's love, so that he can never find final satisfaction in any created being.

2. 'Abode of Snow'—Himalayas

To the Hindu mind the Ganges, born of the Himalayas, is in a sense the incarnation of their spirit. The towns and villages that spring up on its banks and owe their birth to its waters are thus born of the Himalayas at one remove. It is inevitable that, as the spirit becomes more widely diffused into the material world of maya, the task of understanding and interpreting it should become increasingly difficult, and that men's attempts to do so should be marked by obscurity and inconsistency. I was now about to set out for the Himalayas, the 'Abode of Snow' as the word is translated, where I might hope to obtain a glimpse of the truth at its source. Was it not Uma, the daughter of the Himalayas, who revealed the mystic idealism of the *Upanishads* to the gods?—'an imaginative expression [I quote from the Indian White Paper, on the border dispute, of November, 1959] of the historical fact that the thought of the *Upanishads* was developed by the dwellers in the forests and fastnesses of the Himalayas'. Surely it was here, if anywhere, that I might hope to find sadhus of the most spiritual type, a true yogi; where also I should discover the point at which Hinduism comes closest to Christianity.

My objective was Almora, both the district and the village of Almora as well as a number of other places in the district. My journey took me through Lucknow, and since I had business there with the Bishop I intended to stay there for forty-eight hours or so on my way. An account of this does not strictly belong to the story of my quest for a yogi, but since the Bishop was himself a religious, an Italian Capuchin, and a man of keen intellect and long experience of India, it seemed likely that he might be able to help. I did in fact learn much from him, particularly by way of concrete, detailed incidents, that was of

immense value towards understanding the Indian mentality and approach to life. He was not able to direct me to a yogi, although he was in regular contact with his clergy in a diocese that stretches up to the borders of Nepal and Tibet. But even Lucknow itself, with its memories of the Mutiny, its peculiar mixture of Hinduism and Islamism, and relics of Mogul and British rule, can help the seeker for light in his examination of the material world that has its origin in the eternal hills.

LUCKNOW

It was only a few days after my visit to Mumukshu Bhawan that I rolled up my bed and set out for Almora in the Himalayas. Perhaps the phrase 'rolling up one's bed' requires a word of explanation. One of the most common sights at railway stations is a coolie or porter carrying on his head a stack of tin trunks, sometimes three feet high, with invariably perched on top of it all a 'bed-roll'. This, in the case of the more respectable travellers, is contained in the canvas 'hold-all' or 'valise' so common in the last war, often swollen to unbelievable dimensions, in which officers carried not only sleeping-bags but all their worldly goods. It is reasonably waterproof and can be unrolled and rolled up in one minute. These are seen so commonly in India because, as I have said, it is the ambition of every Indian to unroll one over the whole of one side of the compartment of a railway carriage, or, failing that, on the rack overhead; but also because when staying with friends it seems to be usually assumed that one will bring one's own bed. At the end of the visit one must be prepared literally to take up one's bed and walk. I do not know how this custom arose; possibly as a result of travel over long distances at a time when communication was difficult (or at any time once one leaves the main route and has to rely on dak bungalows and rest-houses), so that it was necessary to carry with one all that was likely to be needed for the journey, not least a bed for the night, So now, in such a hospitable country, one rarely finds provided by one's hosts more than a bed-frame of wood or iron, with or without mattress and pillows, but not normally with linen, blankets or towels. I have sometimes in consequence found myself in a suite of rooms, study, bedroom and private bath, but for sleeping nothing

more than a bedstead—and no towels. This is not due to any lack of thought or hospitality on the part of one's hosts, who may have been lavish in their hospitality in every other respect and at the mere hint that it was needed would have produced immediately all that was necessary for the bed: it is just assumed that one will be carrying one's bed.

I duly set out, then, with a very bulky valise or bed-roll, since it contained not only my bed, changes of linen and oddments, but also a portable altar and the minimum of vestments so that I could celebrate Mass when far from a church. It held in addition all the ingredients necessary for making a cup of tea or coffee, including the simplest of spirit stoves and enamel mug; there is nothing better for restoring a failing morale, or when one cannot arrive at a meal.

At Lucknow I was fortunate to meet in addition to the Bishop also another man who, to an extensive knowledge of India and intimate contact with Indians of every class and creed, added an almost unrivalled grasp of the history of Lucknow, including all the details of what the British call the Mutiny and Indians have lately come to speak of as the first stage of a war of independence. Some knowledge of the present situation there throws a certain amount of light on Indian religion in general and in particular on the relation between religion and nationality.

Lucknow, it will be remembered, was one of the storm centres of what for the sake of brevity I shall call the Mutiny, and saw some of the fiercest fighting. It is today a curious mixture of East and West, filled with ancient monuments, and some not so ancient, recalling periods of foreign rule; monuments of which it has never been able wholly to rid itself, or perhaps does not wish to rid itself; more likely still it probably feels it has already made sufficient effort to that end. So, for instance, the ruins of the Residency in which the European population was besieged, the grounds well kept since it is an attraction for tourists, but otherwise standing exactly as it did on the day the relieving forces arrived a hundred years ago—'old, unhappy far-off things'. Or the great monument to the Queen-Empress, the outstanding feature of Victoria Park on the way to the Residency along which the troops fought their way to its relief. The statue has been removed and the massive Gothic canopy

and columns surmounting and surrounding the great empty slab of the pedestal give it the appearance of an altar to an unknown god. Who is to be sacrificed on it and to what deity still remains to be seen. Ingenious explanations of the removal of such statues are given by polite Indians to their British friends, the most common one being that they have been removed to the local museum for their better preservation. The memorial over the well at Cawnpore (Kanpur) into which the bodies of British women and children were thrown has also been removed: it is asserted that this commemorated a myth. A little beyond the Residency the great mosque, courtyard and towering verandahed masses of the 'Palace of the Fish' remind one of the period of Mogul rule, while the names in the French quarter and the great mass and park of Martinière College, now the property of the State but still fulfilling the purpose of its Catholic founders, recall French and British rivalry in India. Yet the source of all this stormy, turbulent, teeming life is, for the Hindu, the solitude of the hills, the 'Abode of Snow': there is reality, this is the illusion.

In the sacristy (vestry) of the Catholic Cathedral I saw other warriors, now at rest or, better, entered into the life of reality—*ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem.* One slab let into the pavement marked it as the tomb of 'Mother Margaret Mary Enright, born Limerick, 1846, died Loreto Convent, Lucknow, 1926'—not a bad span of life for a European woman in the tropics. Opposite this was another slab marking the grave of an Italian Capuchin Friar, born in an obscure Italian village one year later, 1847. It is a sobering thought that the first sisters of this convent, arriving before the Mutiny, had to travel from Bombay to Lucknow by bullock-cart.

It was in Lucknow that I saw a particularly striking example of those extremes of poverty and wealth, private and public, existing side by side, that are always such an incentive to Communism, people feeling that, since they could hardly be worse off, any change must be for the better. Propped against the garden walls of the magnificent public and private buildings that line the main road between the Cathedral and the Residency I noticed numerous heaps of what I took to be refuse. When I drew my companion's attention to these (it was dusk) he assured me that they were temporary dwellings of homeless

people; occasionally they are cleared out and their inhabitants made to move on, but inevitably they return—and what else are they to do? It is their karma. They are working off the retribution of some unspeakable crime—or perhaps not so very unspeakable—in a former incarnation. It is likely to be long, long ages before these become yogis. In Bombay, where the temperature is more constant throughout the year and there is also little variation between day and night, such homeless people live in the streets without any attempt at shelter. I have sometimes experienced a little involuntary impatience at their habit of stretching out across the whole width of the pavement, so that coming on them suddenly in the dark, when returning home at night, one is liable to trip over them.

It is along this same road that a pilgrimage for the expiation of sins takes place each year during the hottest season (having no connection, I hasten to add, with the Mutiny). Men, naked except for a small loin-cloth, 'measure their length' along the hot asphalt road (the average temperature in the shade being 115–118° Fahrenheit, rising occasionally into the 120's). They stretch full length on their faces on the road, placing a stone as far as they can reach in front of them; this marks their next position. They rise, take their stand at the stone, prostrate again and repeat the performance; and so it goes on for many a weary hour until they reach their goal, the point at which the road meets the river. During this pilgrimage they are fasting from all food and drink; there is, however, sometimes a little polite fiction and outwitting of the gods. Their womenfolk, who may be following them on the sidewalk, sometimes slip in and administer surreptitiously a little water. This is not expected to be laid to their charge and I should be surprised if it is. To the Hindu mind this little ruse is not so silly as it may seem. From the very earliest ages religion has been a matter of ritual performance of certain prescribed acts rather than one of internal disposition and change of heart; provided the 'appearances are preserved', the ritual form of fasting, what harm, then, in this slight unofficial alleviation given 'as it were, secretly'? The pilgrimage ends with ritual bathing in the river and the shedding of their sins. It is followed by a night of feasting and merry-making, and one fears that by morning a further expiatory pilgrimage may be necessary; but there is no more. Perhaps

they wait until next year. They have at least borne eloquent witness to the need felt by all men of the expiation of sin.

I was fortunate in the guidance of the friend I have mentioned with his deep knowledge of local history. He took me to the Residency, making the scenes of the Mutiny live again as we went. I was surprised to find the memory of these days still so vivid. The story is still told in the district of an Irish soldier who was left behind when, at the approach of the mutineers, the British troops and the loyal Sepoys blew up the fort with its magazines and retreated to the Residency where the European civilians had been assembled. Foreseeing the lean days ahead he had been imbibing rather too freely and had failed to fall in when the rest of the troops had paraded and marched off. When the charge was fired that blew fort and magazine sky-high he went up with it to a height, so it is said, of 200 ft., made a safe landing, set off in the direction of the Residency, and eventually caught up the retreating column. I pass on the story as I had it. I can only suggest that he may have been a student of yoga and solved the mystery of space flight. It was another Irish soldier who swam the river by night, made his way in disguise through the Indian lines, and carried news of the plight of the besieged garrison.

Near the spot, about a mile this side, where the two relieving columns met and fought their way through to the Residency stands a great stone pillar with surrounding balustrade, erected to the 'Martyrs of Independence' and completely blocking the road that runs along parallel here with the river, so that our car had to leave the road and plough over the open ground at the side in order to get round it. The monument is illuminated at night so that there is little danger of a collision. In time, presumably, the road will be carried round it, but there seem to be no plans for its immediate construction and in the meantime it aroused no small indignation in my companion who was driving. At least the motorist can hardly help noticing it, and that, after all, is the purpose of a monument.

The Residency, as I have said, stands now as it was left when the few survivors staggered out after an incredibly stubborn defence. Some of these died later on the march to safety. At the entrance of the cemetery a rather dog-eared blue-print protected by glass gives the names of those killed during the siege and

buried there. I noticed what must have been the whole family of Captain Ireland, the Keeper of the Residency, I think seven in number. The Anglican church was at first used as a store for grain, but later, as the bombardment grew more intense, the grain was removed to a safer spot and the shelling completely destroyed the building. The cemetery, it should be added, is well tended, and the lawns surrounding the ruins of the buildings beautifully kept.

BHOWALI

In order to reach the Almora district by rail one has to leave Lucknow overnight and travel to Kathgodam, the terminus, at the foot of the hills. The train leaves Lucknow at 8.50 p.m. and arrives at Kathgodam at about 9.15 the following morning. From this terminus there is a good bus service on good roads to the principal hill stations of the district, and using these stations as a centre it is possible to proceed further by bus, private or hired car, pony or simply on foot, according to one's destination and the condition of the minor roads and tracks. My hosts drove me to the railway station, where I arrived just in time to unroll my sleeping-bag on the last vacant luggage-rack, so ensuring myself a quiet night and the possibility of a perfect end.

It was a small blue-and-cream train of narrow (metre) gauge, in contrast to the chocolate-and-red colouring of the main-line broad gauge. It had an engine at both ends; armed guards patrolled the platform and scrutinized closely all who entered; one felt it was conscious of 'going places'. This armed guard is common, especially in northern districts where terrorists may be met with, a train occasionally attacked and looted, and even sometimes derailed; though I personally never experienced any of this in my travels. These armed guards may also be seen in city banks and accompanying mail waggons, always armed with large rifles. One would have thought a revolver, or a 'tommy-gun' if one must have something more lethal, would be more efficient in a confined space; but perhaps a rifle is more conspicuous and so more impressive.

The train was reasonably full for the time of the year when people do not ordinarily go to the hills, but it was obvious that

many of the passengers were soldiers in civilian dress, presumably bound for the frontier to reinforce the troops there. The little corner of India for which I was bound, formed by the conjunction of the borders of Nepal and Tibet, was an obvious place for an invasion or infiltration. In my later travels I several times met Indian army officers in civilian dress who either told me they were soldiers or admitted it when I asked them. I wondered at the time if they had been sent out with the explicit purpose of keeping an eye on suspicious characters such as myself. However, they seemed to find me comparatively harmless and, speaking seriously, I always experienced the greatest friendliness and bonhomie from all the Indian military men I met in India.

As I stood outside my compartment watching the busy scene the usual startling variety of pedlars flowed by including one I had not seen before, carrying on his head a tray of rough earthenware pots, six or seven inches in diameter, each with coloured paper fastened over the top. These, I discovered, contained a sweetmeat peculiar to Lucknow that travellers often bought to take home to their children. Rough, unglazed pottery cups and jars are common, expendable receptacles for a large variety of things in this part of India, often taking the place of the paper cups in Europe: used once and thrown away. It is possible to buy a cup of tea on such stations for the equivalent of about one penny in a cup of this kind, which is then discarded, usually broken so that it may not be used again. One may also see enormous baskets of such cups being unloaded outside the cheaper restaurants in the towns. However, this time I noticed a boy in the uniform of the railway catering service and asked if he could bring me a pot of coffee, emphasizing that it must be very strong. This he produced in a very few minutes and it proved to be the best coffee I had in India, where its quality is always unpredictable. The cost for a pot that produced three cups, and milk in a separate jug, was six annas, about sevenpence.

While I stood there an old, bent sadhu passed by looking for a vacant seat, long white hair flowing over his shoulders, in loin-cloth and shoulder cloth, rolled blanket slung over one shoulder, carrying in one hand a brass pot and in the other his staff, the dhandam, with the brahmin thread wrapped beneath its cotton

covering: the full luggage of a sadhu. Opposite my compartment stood a spindly-legged boy, about twelve years of age, with the refined, sensitive face that made one feel he deserved a better karma than he was likely to meet in this world of maya. He was wearing the common shorts of striped pyjama cloth, with an incredibly dirty shirt flapping over them, and stood there with the air of one who waits for something that he knows is going to happen. He was obviously not to be a traveller, but he made no attempt to beg. Then I saw what he was waiting for. Some passengers had been taking the complete meal, dinner or supper, supplied by the station restaurant at rather less than one shilling: chapatties, rice, bowls of curried vegetables and curd, and a large glass of water, this last not so much for drinking as for rinsing out the mouth after eating—the water should be spat out on the ground or, in a restaurant, into the kind of wash-basin provided—and for washing the fingers that have scooped up the food: it is possible to scoop it up with pieces of chapattie, but even then it is rather a messy business. The attendants were now going along the train removing the trays before it started off, and this was what the boy was waiting for. The trays were placed on the platform ready to be stacked and carried away. The boy approached one of the attendants to whom he was obviously known and held out the front tail of his shirt. Into this the attendant scraped the left-overs in the bowls in one heterogeneous unholy mess: rice, broken chapatties, curry, curd. I put my hand into my pocket, intending to give the boy a few coins to supplement his feast, but before I could do this he had darted away to some distant corner to consume it, and I was afraid of missing my train.

My journey was uneventful and since it was dark most of the time there was not much one could see. The last section of the journey lay through big-game country, but, more important from an economic standpoint, through also the favourite haunt of monkeys. It has been estimated that Uttar Pradesh (United Provinces) where I was now travelling has a population of 23 million monkeys and that they consume almost as much food (including what they destroy) as the human population. The state authorities would like to see their number reduced but the people are very averse to their destruction. In Mysore State they are given divine honours. An Indian priest

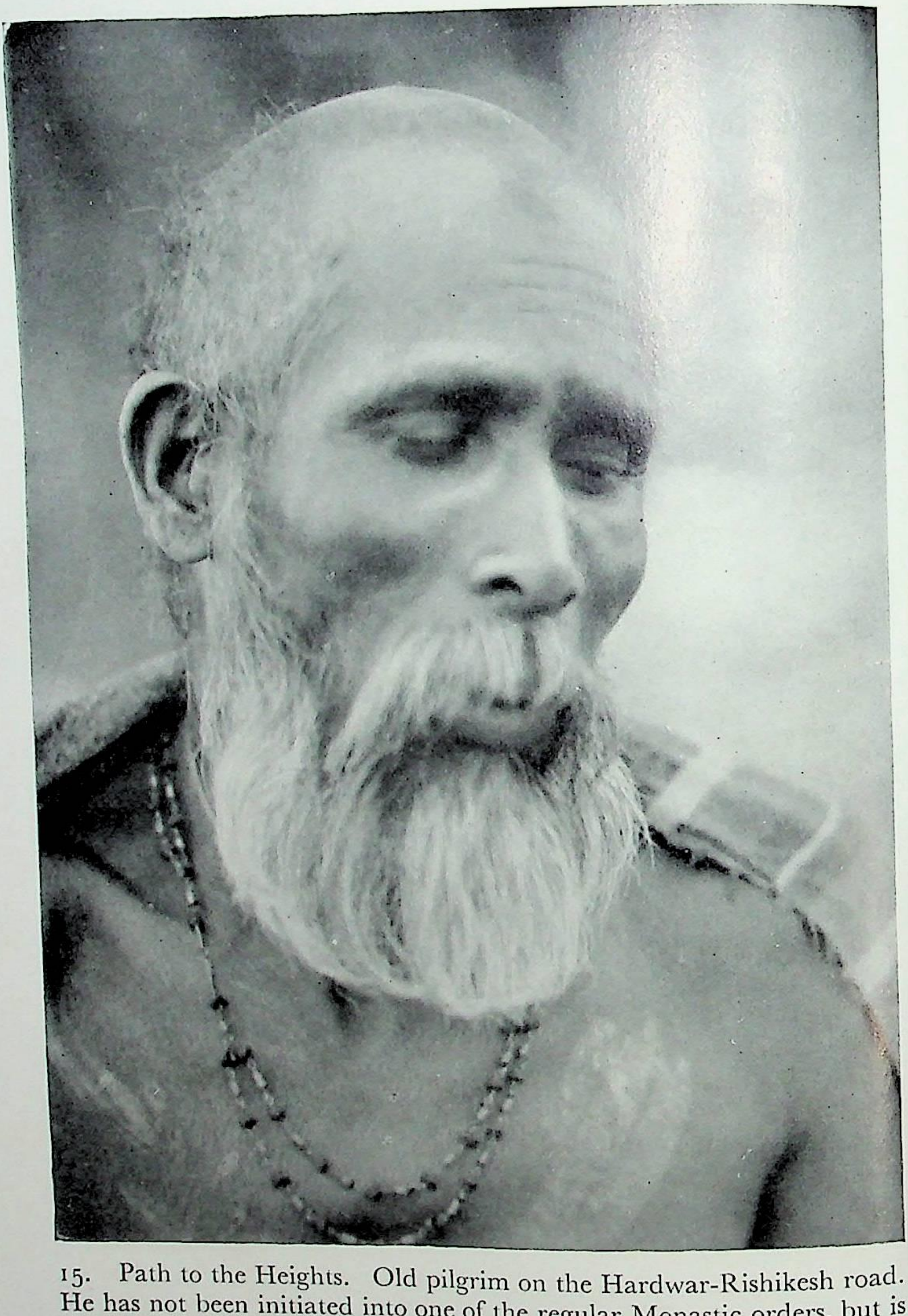
told me that on one occasion the bus in which he was travelling in Mysore ran over and killed a monkey. The passengers alighted and stood, a sorrowing group, round the little body. A hat was then passed round and a collection taken up. Its purpose? To provide a decent burial for the monkey. Should the train on the way to Kathgodam stop by day in the jungle I am told that an invasion of monkeys is common; they will swarm over the carriages and, should a window be open and the passengers be taking refreshment, a hairy arm is likely to shoot through the window and snatch food almost from the would-be eater's mouth.

I had arranged to stay for a couple of days at Bhowali, a small hamlet in the hills some thirty miles from the rail terminus. My principal reason for this halt was to visit a spot a few miles away where the Bishop of Lucknow was hoping to establish a community of contemplative monks. I wished to go over the ground carefully and to weigh up its possibilities. There is at Bhowali, at a height of 6,000 ft., a small Catholic mission in charge of an Italian Capuchin father, a man of 43 with all the energy, vitality, bounce and vivacious manner of a boy of 14. It is a hard and lonely life for such a man. There is a mere handful of Catholics at Bhowali but a comparatively large number at Kathgodam at the foot of the hills, with other scattered groups in other places; and regular contact with these groups involves constant travel. This the Father accomplishes by means of a Lambretta with which he met me at Kathgodam. He was on the way to one of his mission stations and returned only in the evening. He had left instructions with his cook to prepare lunch for me, and a very excellent meal I had. It included wine (this is not a 'dry' state) made by the Father himself with typical Italian resourcefulness from dried raisins. It always seemed odd to me that in Bombay, and I think elsewhere, the supply of mass wine for the diocese is made from expensive imported raisins although grapes grow readily in many parts of India.

The bus journey from Kathgodam to Bhowali takes one hour and a half over an excellent road winding up through wooded country, with breath-taking panoramas coming into sight as it skirts one shoulder of the hill after another. Some of these roads are so winding that the continual change of direction and the



14. Hardwar (pp. 63 and 186). Pilgrims at Bhimgoda Temple and bathing-ghats at Hardwar on the road to Rishikesh. This is the beginning of the pilgrimage route to Gangotri, the reputed source of the Ganges (*see* illus. 12).



15. Path to the Heights. Old pilgrim on the Hardwar-Rishikesh road. He has not been initiated into one of the regular Monastic orders, but is probably a man who has founded a family and, in the older tradition now disappearing, is devoting the rest of his life to the search for 'realisation.' For the four stages of Hindu life see p. 126.

tossing of passengers from one side to another produces the effect of a small boat weaving its way through a rough sea, so that people who are not normally sick when travelling by road often succumb here.

It is part of the delightful incongruity of India that, having travelled through a country where prohibition is in force in all but very few of the states, the first large building that meets the eye at the beginning of one's ascent to the spiritual heights is a brewery. Whether this has been placed here deliberately by some thoughtful authority as an encouragement to the pilgrim thirsting after the higher life, perhaps as an earnest of the spiritual refreshment and repose he may expect to find at journey's end, I cannot tell. Should one, however, be obliged to enquire the way in this district, or wish to locate some particular spot, the opening gambit will quite certainly be: 'Well, you know the brewery . . .' One may be ignorant of everything else, but not to know the brewery is unthinkable. Further evidence of solicitude for the welfare of the pilgrim is a large notice in English by the side of the road a little higher up, near Jeolikote: 'Height is 4,000 ft. Slip over a warm jersey.' On approaching these hill stations a toll is exacted from each passenger, usually of one rupee near the larger stations: a comparatively large amount compared with the fare.

The priest's catechist had been instructed to meet me at the bus stop and take me to the mission, but he was not there when I arrived and I had to ask my way since there was not in sight anything resembling a Catholic mission (usually quite unmistakable with its chapel, priest's bungalow, servants' quarters and usually school, orphanage and small convent of sisters; this one in fact was on a much smaller scale). I might leave this little incident there, as one of the things that do happen in the best-regulated families. It probably was just that, and I do not suggest that any blame should be attached to the young man; certainly it was not the fault of my host whose hospitality and care for all my needs was, one can only say, typically Franciscan in its kindly open-handedness. I could leave it at that, but to do so would be to pass over an aspect of Indian life that is all-pervasive. I had been in India long enough to know that, although someone had been detailed to meet me, the odds were about

even that he would not be there; not, that is, if he were a Christian. A non-Christian would probably have been there, squatting patiently on the ground, at least one hour before the bus arrived and possibly two hours before: he would certainly have been there.

During the calamitous summer of 1940, going up to the line in France immediately before the collapse, at a time when all the traffic except ourselves seemed to be moving in the reverse direction, I spent a considerable part of the night discussing this question with a non-Catholic senior officer for whom it was the greatest obstacle to acceptance of the Catholic Faith—'By their fruits you shall know them.' He was a regular soldier who had served some years in India. He told me that the average Indian peasant was honest, truthful, kindly, hard-working, loyal and completely dependable; that when he became a Christian he also became lazy, untrustworthy, insolent, with a tendency to lying and stealing. I had not then been in India and so was compelled to accept what he said as correct (it has since been confirmed as substantially true by missionaries with long experience in India). I suggested possible explanations: the truth of a faith could not be judged, for example, by people who did not live up to its teachings. He admitted that there were good Christian converts and there were, of course, extremely bad non-Christians; still in general the difference was so marked that no one could fail to notice it.

There was, and there is, no complete answer. The Faith, with its lofty moral code and sacramental grace, should make men better. It would be a fault in logic to say it makes them worse; but it does seem a demonstrable fact that in a noticeably large number of cases they are worse *after* it if not *because* of it. I have since posed this question to several missionary priests I met in different parts of the country. To the alleged facts they replied: 'Father, it's perfectly true.' Their explanation of it, though they agreed there is no complete explanation, tended to run on these lines: The Indian before conversion lives in fear, fear of his gods, of innumerable unseen spiritual forces, fear of men with magical powers, fear of his karma, of involving himself still further in the cycle of rebirth. Once he has embraced Christianity he knows just where he stands; sins are graded in order of turpitude and it is often the smaller ones, not in themselves bad enough to de-

prive one of salvation, that make life most difficult for one's fellow-men; and anyway, if one should overstep the mark altogether, God is by definition good, a God of Love who will forgive and go on forgiving.

Perhaps this is as near as one can get to an explanation. I suggest that it may be partially explained also by the fact that Christian converts are commonly recruited from the 'untouchables' and the lowest castes (the 'Syrian', i.e. Eastern-Rite, Catholics are an exception to this). Their acceptance as Christians constitutes an immense rise in the social scale; they acquire a quasi-caste. They acquire also a certain measure of social security; the resources of most Catholic missionaries are small but they do have alms to administer, they can often find employment for their people and they usually have schools: at very least it is most unlikely that any of their flock would actually starve. Speaking of Catholics, all I am qualified to do, I can say that these economic advantages are never held out as an incentive to potential converts; on the contrary converts are normally tested most rigorously in order to discover their true motives for wishing to become Christians: but clearly it is not easy to distinguish. But it seems to me that the really effective cause of any deterioration is probably this: the realization, suddenly, that they, who were of the lowest, are now the equals of all men—so they think; equal to their white rulers (or former rulers); superior—as they feel—to the mass of their benighted fellow-countrymen, in a brotherhood of man that transcends all caste and class and colour distinction; probably what they think of as 'democracy'. This is expressed as an unwillingness to admit any obligation to anyone; a violent reaction to their former state. Such a view is obviously a distortion of Christianity. The Church is not a democracy but a hierarchy, a body with many members of varying degrees of nobility. Even in the final state, in heaven, there will be 'many mansions' and class distinctions, though these will bear no necessary relationship to man's 'class' in this world, and the criterion for admission to the best set will be different. Everyone will, in any case, be then perfectly happy to keep in his place.

At the deeper level it must be remembered that the good works of those outside the visible body of the Church are performed through the grace, the divine assistance and vitality,

that comes to them through the Church[1] and is designed to lead them to it. If, in view of their more difficult and hazardous condition, they should receive on occasion a little more assistance than the rest—well I, for one, shall not grumble. This is not the place to pursue the topic, but it must be mentioned in any balanced presentation of India and its religions. Again I say that I have not the slightest reason to think that the particular catechist I have mentioned was not one of the very highest type of Indian Catholic, of whom there are many. The problem was simply recalled to my mind by this incident.

Enquiring my way here in Bhowali was a little difficult since none of the bystanders spoke English and I did not know the local language. It was apparently made obvious to them that I was looking for the local clergy, but it happened that there was also a Protestant church in the place, perched on a little shoulder of hill, with no resident clergy, and to this I was directed. They probably recognized me as English; the Catholic priest was Italian, the Protestant minister English (or Scots), therefore . . . I was a little dubious, since this church stood alone, without the usual compound and little collection of buildings, but I found a coolie to carry my valise and we set off up the hill. Before reaching the church I became convinced that we were on the wrong track and turned back. We did eventually arrive at the Catholic mission, about a mile away, also on a hill but concealed by trees and standing out of sight round a bend in the road. My coolie was not too pleased about all this meandering about, but brightened visibly and positively beamed when I gave him, not much, but clearly more than he had expected. I had already noted that in the hills loads were not carried on the head, as they are in the plains; presumably because in ascending a steep slope it is necessary to lean forward and correspondingly difficult to balance a load on one's head. This is pure surmise; I never tried it. Here loads are slung on the back by strong ropes or straps which are brought forward round the forehead, so that the load is supported by both back and head, while the bearer is bent almost parallel with the road. In big hill stations such as Naini Tal,

[1] The Church is, of course, in the Christian conception, one with Christ who is God, the *pleroma* or fulness of Christ. Cf. p. 30 and p. 47. Cf. also p. 309.

that are holiday resorts and also have big boarding-schools, all supplies, including even such commodities as coal, have to be carried up from the main road in this way; incredibly heavy loads (usually by men and boys who are clearly of Tibetan rather than Indian stock, and much tougher) at a miserably small wage.

When I mentioned the incident to my host he told me that I should have asked for 'The Father of the Milk', the title by which he is known in the district as distinguishing him from the Protestant missionary who pays only occasional visits to the district. Asking for an explanation of this strange title I was told that it all arose from the ubiquitous American milk powder. He received supplies of this for distribution (it is, of course, given to all who need it while it lasts, irrespective of creed): hence the title. It was from priests such as this, with whom I stayed on my travels, who have lived many years in close contact with the people, that I was able to gain my insights into their character and religious beliefs. These priests too, if anyone, would surely have heard of a true yogi anywhere in their district as they travelled about and talked to the people; still more easily would they have heard of any reputedly marvellous and quasi-miraculous happenings. In fact not one of them had, and they had no illusions about the general character of the ordinary run of 'wonder-worker'.

It was in the North, Lucknow and onwards, that I first heard mention of positive hostility towards Christians. I except the case of Kerala where I had, as I have said, seen it, and it was a clear case of Communism versus the rest. My host, for instance, 'Father of the Milk' though he was, told me that only that morning, when meeting me at Kathgodam, he had passed a girl about thirteen years old with a smaller child, and had heard her say to the younger one: 'Look out; he's a bad man: he'll get you.' The Father had thereupon stopped and expostulated (of course in their own language): 'No, it is not true: I am not a bad man, and I will not get you.' But the little incident, he said, was typical. Passing through the bazaars one encountered many black looks and occasional mutterings. I heard the same elsewhere. In the case of peasants and country districts my own impression is that such hostility arises principally from fear and distrust of the unknown and foreign.

Where it exists among the dominant brahmin caste of the cities, as I am told it does, it is seated more deeply; the expression of what is experienced as a radical opposition on the spiritual and social planes, and perhaps not least from opposition to a power that tends to challenge, deliberately or not, their own claim to superiority and dominion. Here again it is only right to add that nothing could be more fair than the attitude of the Prime Minister to the Christian bodies, and indeed of the great majority of the heads of states and local authorities.

My visit to Naukuchiatal ('The Lake of the Nine Corners'), my principal reason for stopping at Bhowali, I shall pass over here. Local legend says that anyone who sees all nine corners of the lake at once will die within the year, but since this is physically impossible there is no real danger. I suppose one might do it by chartering a plane or helicopter: but there are easier ways of dying. My purpose was to inspect it as a possible site for a Christian monastery of the normal, traditional 'contemplative' type. The question of the best site for a monastery, which arose here as a practical question, has a certain relevance to the subject of this book since it applies to monasticism in general and the establishment of contact with the unseen world.

A Benedictine monastery, as we have seen, is traditionally a small self-contained world, a complete community, a microcosm, with all that is necessary for the support of life contained within it.[1] The sole object of its members is to seek union with God, yoga in the Hindu phrase; but we have seen that by com-

[1] This concept of a single pattern reproduced in increasing degrees of perfection throughout the whole of creation (cf. the scheme of the Pseudo-Denys, p. 37) with God present wholly in the universe of being as a whole and wholly in each part, is fundamental to both Hindu and Christian thought. It is seen clearly in the early Christian idea of the human race as, in Christopher Dawson's phrase, a 'community of communities', from the family up to the family of nations in Christendom, the Mystical Body of Christ, with as its corollary the dignity and sanctity of the human person and the principle that it is a reversal of the right order to assign to a higher body a function that can be performed efficiently by a lower. Man, in this scheme, stands between the unseen world of 'pure spirits' or 'energies' and the world of phenomena, with one foot in each, himself the pattern of the larger world, the macrocosm, so that all that is in the larger world is first in him. Hindu (Ayurvedic) medicine (seen in its purer form in Tibetan medicine where it has been less exposed to western influence) is based on this concept. Cf. p. 226.

munion in the Mystical Body this may in fact also be the most effective way of bringing the whole of the human race to union. Apart from that it has no direct visible work for the world outside its walls, but by a strange paradox this very fact does give it a strong influence over a very wide area: by merely existing in this way it forms a model for all Christian communities; it is the whole Church, the whole Mystical Body, in miniature. There are in fact inevitable calls of charity, especially in a remote district, that make occasional direct work outside necessary, but these are incidental; a spontaneous overflow of the power received in union with God and, properly regulated, may tend to intensify the spiritual vitality of such a community rather than diminish it.

The question is whether, when considering the site for such a community, one should seek an isolated spot such as the 'Lake of the Nine Corners', as far from people as possible, since the whole object of such a community is *ex professo* to leave all else in order to concentrate on the search for union with God. Or should one choose a spot sufficiently retired to ensure the physical solitude and silence that universal experience has found conducive to contemplation, normally essential in the first stages, yet near enough to a centre of population to be of direct help also to others—without, and this is a big qualification, endangering one's primary purpose and so ultimately one's effectiveness. Lay people in such circumstances are, for instance, able to assist at the liturgical worship in the church, normally carried out in such communities with especial care and solemnity with, of course, a full choir at the canonical hours throughout the day, that is impossible for the ordinary parish church and even for most cathedrals. Further there are always guests in a monastery for periods of spiritual refreshment, frequent calls for spiritual guidance and visits by people who want to discuss spiritual and philosophical problems and even matters of a wider range including the practical and fine arts. Should they be deprived of this opportunity? Not least, vocations, aspirants to the life, are likely to be more numerous where the existence of a monastery is known to a larger number and easily accessible. The danger is that a monastery will be drawn into the life of the city and lose its true orientation, doing perhaps excellent work but losing its own soul in the process. This is an abiding

danger. Small tasks undertaken in and for the neighbouring parishes insensibly increase until in the end the whole nature of the monk's life has changed: he is hardly distinguishable from the professed missionary or pastoral priest. 'Above all fly from women and bishops' was the advice given to the monks of the desert, and in general it has been proved to be sound policy. Women can be kept out easily enough; it is not so easy to exclude bishops.

It is a problem I have never been able completely to resolve. Most of the clergy in India to whom I spoke, including bishops, have pointed to the advantages of being situated near a large centre of population: 'No one knows you are there on the top of that hill; how can people join you if they don't know you are there?' Banaras, Hardwar (near Rishikesh and perhaps the densest concentration of anti-Christian Hinduism anywhere in the world), Kalimpong, near the North-East Frontier at the crossroads of the trade routes, were all suggested in addition to the suburbs of a city such as Bombay. Others, a minority, have said: 'If you have something to give them, they will come for it; people come thousands of miles on pilgrimage to the Himalayas.' The testimony of history certainly shows that great movements of spiritual revival have always begun in solitude; that monks have declined in quality in proportion as they were drawn back into the world they had left; that they have done most for the world by leaving it alone. My own instinct is to choose complete solitude as a site for a community of this kind, while I do realize the validity of arguments for placing it near a town. The latter seems to me a compromise, lacking the courage of one's convictions, ultimately a lack of faith in God, in the fact that given a complete and implicit devotion God can and may use man for his own designs in his own way (normally inscrutable to man): but perhaps I am wrong. Two European abbots to whom I posed this question, one a man of very wide experience, both of them highly intelligent and well read and, I believe, deeply spiritual men, refused to commit themselves. It became clear to me as I went round that the same problem existed for Hindu monks, and I was interested to meet from them also different points of view.

RANIKHET

From Bhowali I set out, again by bus, for Ranikhet, where I hoped to get useful information and possibly direction to the kind of yogi I was seeking. From Ranikhet I could go on to Almora where, if anywhere, I should be able to find a true yogi, and where I had references to several people who would know if one did exist in the district. The night before leaving Bhowali I sat in the late afternoon outside the mission house, looking down the valley towards Bhimtal, reviewing my experiences and writing up notes. This view of mountain, lake and forest must surely be one of the most attractive in the Himalayas. The lake Bhimtal, with the mountains towering behind it, is perhaps no more than four miles away in a straight line, but the road covers ten miles to reach it. Directly below the hill where I sat the road curved in a hairpin bend over a distance of more than a mile in order to avoid a steep slope of not more than one hundred yards.

The journey to Ranikhet is about forty miles and the bus takes, if I remember rightly, about two hours, stopping at one or two small teahouses in villages on the way. Ranikhet is the next Catholic mission in this district and I had arranged to stay here as a convenient centre for forays further into the hills. It occurred to me while I was on the bus that in a northerly direction this must be the last Catholic church in Asia. Travelling due north from this point one comes to Tibet; beyond is nothing but the vast spaces of the Soviet Communist Empire with, one presumes, still Christian churches with valid sacraments, but no longer in communion with the Catholic Church. It was a sobering thought.

It was on this journey that I first noticed cotton jodhpurs as a common dress of poorer-class Indians. One of my fellow-travellers, a prosperous-looking Indian in western dress, was carrying at his side a revolver and slung across his chest beneath his jacket a fully-stocked cartridge-belt. This I had noticed once or twice before in the North. I was slightly annoyed over the fact that the catechist, who had evidently been called to order by the Father and detailed to escort me to the bus (the priest himself was by this time away again on his Lambretta to visit another distant mission), had bought me a

ticket for the 'higher' or 'upper' class. Most buses on the main routes in Northern India do have an 'upper class'. This consists of six or eight seats immediately behind the driver, sometimes separated from the rest of the seats and entered by a different door, at other times not. On some routes these seats are a little more comfortable than those assigned to the lower orders, but not always; in this case they were just the same. The fare is about forty per cent higher. However, 'U' I was and 'U' I must remain, at least for this journey. Later, on a small local route over very dusty, rough roads further in the hills, I approached a ticket office and asked for a ticket to my destination. I was certainly not feeling at all 'U', my khaki drill dusty and travel-stained, but the clerk in his grubby little booth took one look at me and said: 'No upper class in *this* bus.' It is always assumed that a European will wish to travel in the most expensive way, but I assured him that I did not want 'upper' class. Even so he did not seem quite happy about this and gave me a little chit with a seat number, sending an assistant to escort me to the bus and ensure that I got the seat. This is the kind of thing that does happen frequently in India. There was no servility. I was accustomed, so he thought, to better modes of travel; therefore he must do something about it. There was, of course, no extra charge for this special seat which was, incidentally, number one.

The road to Ranikhet winds along the contour of the hill, and particularly noticeable on this section were the labour and skill that had been expended on terracing almost every yard of the hillside to a height of four to five thousand feet. In other places and at higher levels forests of tall firs (the exact species I am ashamed to say I did not recognize) were being tapped for resin. This seemed to be a fairly big industry, for we passed a number of collecting centres on the way. At one spot, rather unexpectedly, a badminton net was spread over a strip of level turf at the side of the road.

At a halting-place on the road we caught up with a bus from Naini Tal bound for the same destination, though I did not know this at the time, from the 'U' portion of which emerged an apparently European family. They too were in fact bound for the Catholic mission house at Ranikhet, though at the time I did not know this either. I was feeling chilly, rather tired and disinclined to move, so I remained in my seat, where I could

not refrain from speculating on the nationality of this family. I had come into contact with hardly any Europeans during my stay in India, except the Jesuit Fathers in Poona (about half of them Europeans, the rest Indian). The people of the Poona district are in fact rather light in colour, and in any case after a time one almost fails to advert to colour at all, but on the rare occasions when one sees, for instance, European children in shorts and short-sleeved shirts they do look quite startlingly white. This family consisted of a boy of about twelve years, flaxen-haired, snub-nosed, rosy-cheeked with blue eyes behind large round glasses, and a tall fair-haired girl whom I assumed to be about seventeen. At the mission later, when I spoke to her, and also saw her playing marbles with her brother, I revised this estimate and decided that she was not more than fourteen, or at most fifteen. Both were dressed in jeans and pullovers, and the girl, when they alighted from the bus, was busily chewing gum. The mother was young, almost too young in appearance to be the mother of these two, with dark hair but clearly European, and with them was an Indian boy, perhaps seventeen years old, whose relationship I never established, whether adopted son or friend; but the lady seemed to exercise an equally efficient control over all three.

They could have been American—the gum suggested this: I did not think they were English: more probably they were German. I learned at Ranikhet, when we met, that they were the wife and family of the Hungarian music-master at the big boarding-school of the Irish Christian Brothers at Naini Tal. The school was on vacation, the brothers were making their annual 'retreat' (retirement for a course of special spiritual exercises), and the family had taken the opportunity of an excursion to Ranikhet which has one of the best uninterrupted views of a long stretch of the highest peaks of the Himalayas. Their name was the not very Hungarian one of Ludwig and the mother was half Scottish. The priest at Ranikhet, who was to be my host, was an old friend of theirs, having known the mother from childhood. They were to spend the night there and return to Naini Tal the following day.

Perhaps a word of explanation is required about such small missions as this with a priest, a quite imposing, well-built church capable of seating (I speak from memory) perhaps four

hundred or so, with yet a mere handful of Christians. Such places were, under British rule, military stations with considerable permanent garrisons. Churches were built either directly by the military authorities or from the voluntary subscriptions of the soldiers, and the priest could count on a full church of soldiers and soldiers' families. (Along the front of the pews of this church I noticed queer little slits at regular intervals, designed, I was told on enquiry, to hold the rifles of soldiers during service.) With the withdrawal of the British from such posts the church here has been left practically empty and the priest's living has disappeared with his flock. One could not help wondering whether perhaps contentment with their foreign congregation may not have prevented the clergy doing all they might have done for the spread of religion among the native population. I venture to add this remark since it was also made to me by some of the missionary clergy themselves: but it is easy to be wise after the event, and India even today, with its mixture of races, religions, castes and other social distinctions, is a uniquely complex society.

I saw no Europeans in this little hill station except the Father in charge of the mission, an Italian Capuchin again, and this visiting family. How exceptional a sight Europeans now are was impressed upon me by one little incident. Mrs. Ludwig and her daughter wanted to visit the bazaar, partly to buy provisions and also to enjoy the view of the mountains. Since I sensed that they were a little nervous of going alone I asked if I might have the pleasure of accompanying them. The bazaar is not more than about half a mile from the cantonment if one takes a short cut through a little wooded dell then climbs again the hill opposite. The bazaar itself straggles along the side of the hill running roughly east and west. To the north the lands falls away abruptly into a deep valley, giving an unrivalled view of the mountains beyond, the snow-bound peaks of Nanda Devi, Nanda Kot and Trisul, and the Pindari glacier, for a brief moment in the evening flushed to a rosy red by the rays of the setting sun, rapidly fading to a cold forbidding grey. About one hundred road miles due north is the famous Temple of Badrinath, one of the most frequented Himalayan centres of pilgrimage but usually submerged in snow between November and May. The original temple is said to have been built by

Samkaracharya in the ninth century but the present building is modern. There are hot sulphurous springs formed into a bath in which devotees bathe.

As we walked down the narrow bazaar between the rows of shops I noticed that every head swivelled round as we passed, and it was evident that it was the tall fair girl with the flaxen hair who was the attraction. Two old Tibetan women in particular, bent and wrinkled, with round, flat faces and dark, bright eyes whom I almost brushed in passing, stood in open-mouthed and open-eyed amazement, nudging one another and staring, smiling and nodding in her direction. The girl herself was clearly old enough to be conscious of all this yet still child enough to be embarrassed by it. I remarked to Mrs. Ludwig that her daughter seemed to be attracting considerable attention and she explained that Indians always think very fair hair is white and so a mark of old age, and they find it hard to understand how so obviously young a girl can have white hair.

I learned later that freckles are thought to be some kind of skin disease and Indians are quite incredulous when told that it is simply the effect of the sun on fair skin; in India they get so very much more sun yet have no freckles. This is true, but there is in India a fairly common affection called leukoderma which causes very unsightly dead white patches on otherwise dark skin; sometimes almost the whole face is this chalky-white colour with only a few traces of the original dark skin left. It is often called white leprosy, but in fact has no connection at all with leprosy and is not infectious or contagious. It seems to be merely, like freckles, a fault in the pigmentation of the skin; the skin and flesh are otherwise quite sound and healthy. Many specifics are sold for it but reliable doctors, as distinct from the numberless quacks, seem agreed that there is no known cure at present.

Father Lewis, the Father in charge of the mission here, is a little round, rosy-cheeked, slightly bent man, with white beard and high, piping treble voice, who in his brown Franciscan habit might have stepped straight out of the pages of the *Fioretti* of St. Francis. He had spent 52 of his 74 years in India. His last visit to Italy was in 1936 and he explained that he would not be going again. At his age he could hardly be sent back

again to India, yet he would in fact find it hard now to adjust himself to the climate and other conditions of Italy after so many years away. In the meantime he was still able to do a job in India; he was not capable of travelling far now but he did in fact make missionary journeys. I had the impression that his meals must be of the most meagre kind since what was prepared as an especial feast in honour of a guest and spoken of in anticipation with great relish was of the most modest character. In the evening a portion of cauliflower, about three inches in diameter, was set before each of us by his bearer, but this he seemed to think was not fit fare for a guest, so the cook was summoned, a cupboard unlocked, and two eggs produced for each of us. I do not think he will take this amiss should he see it, or interpret it as suggesting that he failed in any way in hospitality. I intend it only as an illustration of the frugality such priests may have to exercise. Still I must say he looked very well on it; perhaps this is the secret of old age.

This Father combined to an unusual degree a typically Franciscan child-like simplicity of manner and singleness of vision with a very shrewd practical judgement, and I had a number of very valuable talks with him on the subject of yogis and sadhus. In his fifty-odd years in India, a number of them in this district, which is, if the expression be allowed, the special stamping-ground of sadhus, he had known and heard of many and had been in personal contact with some. But he did not know one of the kind I wanted to meet, nor had he ever met or heard of such a one; he knew of no one who was able to perform any of the marvels of the siddhis. His own impression was that as a body these sadhus, of the kind that lived in the hills, were good, earnest men who lived hard ascetic lives (bearing in mind, however, that the life of every poor man in India is hard and perforce ascetic, and that these sadhus at least do no work). He had met none, however, nor heard of any, who had achieved any considerable degree of what we would call sanctity, certainly no sanctity accompanied or confirmed by miracles, by 'manifest signs and wonders'. He had, of course, met some scoundrels among them, and he spoke in some detail of the exploits of one in particular. While I was there one wandering sadhu had taken up a position in a little clearing of a wood a few hundred yards away and had attracted a little band of

clients; but he was not recommended as likely to be able to contribute anything to my purpose.

Typical of the stories told of the less reputable sadhus is one I had, not from this father but from another who shall be nameless; a man of unimpeachable integrity. There called on him one day asking for help a man, an Indian, who had become a Catholic and then returned to Hinduism, and now appeared in the full trappings of a sadhu. He admitted frankly that he had done so as the most secure means of obtaining a living. The priest noticed to his surprise that the man now had a withered hand which was quite unusable, and asked about it, for this was something new since last they met. The man replied that it was, so to speak, part of his stock-in-trade: it brought increased contributions. He would not show the priest how it was done, but retired behind a door for a few moments and returned with his hand restored to normal. It would obviously be unfair to group such a man with genuine sadhus—he had no belief at all in Hinduism—but to the ordinary man he is a sadhu and there are undoubtedly many more of the same type.

It was while I was in the north that I learned for the first time that there were female sadhus, leading the same wandering life as the men. Buddhist nuns, living in convents according to rule, I knew of, but not the female Hindu sadhu. Later I was to meet one or two of them, and those I did meet seemed earnest, devout women. Their life follows much the same pattern as that of the men. They wear the familiar saffron colour, in their case a species of sari-like garment. They normally have a small cell, often in the neighbourhood of a temple, to which they return from time to time; but like the men they are continually travelling from place to place. Like that of the men their life too is strict. It includes rising at about 4 a.m. and beginning the day with a period of two to three hours of meditation and prayer. One such female sadhu calls periodically on a priest I met in the hills in order to discuss religion with him. She was educated in England before taking up this way of life; is in fact inclined towards Christianity; says there is 'nothing in Hinduism' (this was a phrase I was to hear repeatedly); but some form of religious life would be the only one possible for her and she felt that life in a Christian convent would be quite impossible after her present wandering, independent existence. She also seemed

afraid of her guru; whether he had some preternatural or hypnotic power over her I cannot tell.

Of all the Catholic priests I met in the hills Fr. Lewis seemed to have the closest contact with sadhus and received sadhus of both sexes: he does, of course, live in the district where they abound. Usually Christian priests and sadhus tend to avoid one another as being mutually incompatible. Even while I was in conversation with Fr. Lewis one day a sadhu called in to see him and was taken away to a quiet room.

Although Fr. Lewis could not direct me to a true yogi in my sense of the phrase or to one credited with the abnormal physical powers of a yogi, he was able to give me a reference to a Moslem merchant in Almora, an educated man who had lived there for many years, supplied provisions over a wide area and knew intimately the whole district. He knew its inhabitants with, as is common in country districts everywhere, all their private history, and in general all the gossip of the place. Being a Moslem he was not likely to be more favourable to Hindus than to Christians, not inclined to conceal anything he did know, and might reasonably be taken as an impartial judge or referee on the yogis true or false of the district. Over a wide area it was unlikely that there would be anything worth knowing that he did not know.

I had already obtained in Banaras, as the reader will remember, several names of sadhus in this area, with the assurance that any one of them would know all that was to be known of the district and would quite certainly know any outstanding spiritual personality or practitioner of the marvellous. I was then, so it seemed to me, exceptionally well equipped to find a true yogi here, always supposing there was one to be found; and this, if anywhere, was the place to find one. In fact, as it turned out, of the people I hoped to meet here one was at the moment in Delhi; of another I was told by one whom I considered a shrewd judge (not the merchant I have mentioned) that he was not the type I was looking for, not a really spiritual man but one who spent his time running after celebrities and insinuating himself into the limelight—an easily recognized Indian type. I also found that sadhus tend to leave the hills in the winter and go down to the plain. This would, however, have the advantage of thinning the ground, so to speak, since it would presumably

be the more zealous and ascetic who would remain to face the comparative rigours of a Himalayan winter. In any case any one of these to whom I had been referred should have been able to tell me all I wanted to know. For reasons that will be obvious I shall omit the names of people mentioned in the account that follows, as also, in some cases, detailed reference to the places where I met them. I am prepared to supply details to anyone who can show reasonable cause why he should have them.

ALMORA

The journey, again by bus, from Ranikhet to Almora was without incident once I did get away. I rose at 4 a.m.—a chilly 4 a.m. at that time of the year—but owing to incidents beyond my control, as the saying goes, was not able to leave until 11.45 a.m. This fact is worthy of mention only because it is the kind of thing that at any time and place may bedevil travel in the East. Although the distance is given officially as 30 miles we did not arrive until 2.30 p.m. One sight that might have surprised one not prepared for it, seen as I waited for the bus, was that of a young man dressed in western-style slacks and shirt tucked into them (not outside), on his head a white Gandhi cap, on his back a small rucksack and in his hand a spindle on which he was spinning cotton as he walked. He was probably on pilgrimage, modern style, to some temple or shrine, and apparently a devotee of Gandhiji with his scheme for introducing into every village as a basic small home industry the spinning and weaving of cotton. It is a point of honour still among disciples of Gandhi and his teaching to wear only hand-woven cotton cloth.

'*Indian-Style Hotel*'

I had not made any arrangements for my lodging in Almora, assuming that since it was winter I should have no difficulty in finding accommodation. On arrival there I selected a coolie for my valise and asked him to take me to the dak bungalow. These bungalows, owned and controlled by the state, are to be found along travel routes all over India and are an extraordinarily valuable institution. They are cheap and have this advantage that one always knows what one will find; which is more than can be said for the hotels. For about three rupees a day (about

4*s*. 6*d*.) one has a shelter, some kind of very simple furniture and bedstead, always cooking facilities, sometimes even pots and pans, crockery and cutlery, always water, sometimes the whole bungalow to oneself, at other times usually a room to oneself; all under the care of a chowkidar or caretaker. Unfortunately the bungalow here was already full; surprisingly at this time of the year, but Christmas holidays (the schools in the hills close for three months or more at this time of the year) seemed to have brought a few travellers. On enquiry I found there was a 'western-style' hotel in the place to which I was strongly advised to go. There was also a new 'Indian-style' hotel, 'The Ambassador'. I chose 'The Ambassador'. It might have seemed a little incongruous to seek the higher reaches of Hindu spirituality from the comparative luxury of a 'western-style' hotel. There was also the consideration that I was much more likely to meet the local people there; I also knew that the cost would be only about a quarter that of the 'western-style' and it was close to the bus stop. Accordingly I instructed my coolie to lead me to 'The Ambassador'.

Indian style it may have been; it certainly was not ambassadorial style. However, one cannot expect too much for three rupees a day, which was all they charged for a room with bed (no mattress, bedding, linen or towels), chair, minute table, dressing table, drab and dingy and so dark that it needed artificial light all day—only this was cut off during the hours of what outside was daylight. Meals could be obtained in the restaurant attached. Perhaps it was not really dirty, though it was not clean either. I always carry in my sleeping-bag a tin of D.D.T. powder as a material reinforcement of the compline petition for 'a quiet night and a perfect end', yet I retired the first night in some trepidation at the thought of the plague of bugs and fleas that I half expected. Much to my surprise I was not troubled, and it was not until my last morning there that, while kneeling at my devotions, I glanced up to see one solitary bug regarding me from the wall with a baleful glare. This may well have been understandable resentment at being robbed of the unusual opportunity of feeding on the blood of an Englishman. The proprietor had at first seemed rather reluctant to take me in, probably feeling that ambassadorial style might not be quite my own style; but he proved very friendly and helpful

when he heard that I wanted to make this a centre for a few days for expeditions to sadhus and lamas in the adjoining hills —what, after all, could be more edifying?—and I used to wander round his kitchen to see what was cooking and point out what I wanted, since I rarely knew its name.

On my first entry into the restaurant a young Sikh boy, about fifteen to sixteen years old, in smart western dress, still beardless but his braided hair already concealed beneath the traditional Sikh turban, sprang up and asked if he could be of any assistance. It appeared that he was on holiday with his father, brother and sister; his home was in New Delhi. He was fair-skinned, nice-mannered, spoke perfect English and was obviously of what in India would correspond to the British better middle-class of former days. He sat down with me and chatted easily, and eventually asked if I was 'a priest or something'. I told him I was a priest *and* something. I have already mentioned the Indian genius for detecting caste and even sub-castes among their own people, and the fact that, although my dress was anything but clerical on these expeditions, it was always assumed that I was a priest; not a missionary or any other species of Christian minister, but a Catholic priest. This boy had just taken his Oxford and Cambridge Exam. at a big Delhi school and hoped to go abroad, either to Germany or to England, to study petrol refining. In Germany language would be a difficulty; in England he could have passed easily for English had he been divested of his turban (which would, of course, have been unthinkable). Later I heard the usual banter being exchanged between him and his brother and sister; the smaller brother being apparently renowned for his gastronomic achievements, as one member of a family of children invariably is. I mention this because the family looked rather out of place in what was, by western standards, a distinctly 'scruffy' place. One might have met them in the first-class of a liner or in a good hotel in London.

My short stay here should have been in every sense of the word the peak of my enquiry, and perhaps in one sense it was. Here, or hereabouts, is born the great serpent that sprawls over India to encompass the whole earth. It is here that the invisible becomes visible and expands into the world of material phenomena. A withdrawal from external phenomena to the solitude

and apparent sterility and desolation of the heights is in fact an ascent to a concentration of life and reality until a point is reached at which man is able to survey and encompass all reality, all space and time at its source as contained within himself; as identified with it, yet without loss of separate conscious personality. Such, so far as I understand it, is the Hindu conception; an adumbration of the experience of the Christian mystic, in itself the intense expression of a reality inherent in greater or less degree in all Christian life.

My first call, on the evening of my arrival, was on the Moslem merchant to whom I had an introduction. I will say quite briefly that he knew of no one in the vicinity with any particular claim to what we would call sanctity, a true yogi; certainly none endowed with any preternatural powers. I am sure he was sincere; he had no reason for concealing anything he knew, and he was clearly willing to help me. He did give me information of sadhus and others who were the most likely to help, but without holding out any hope that I would find what I wanted. Among the people he mentioned were those to whom I had already been referred, but a new reference, to one who had a wide general knowledge of the subject, was followed up immediately and proved to be most rewarding. This was a European lady in the district, a student and writer, married to an Indian. She was a student of Hinduism and in particular of Hindu monasticism and spirituality. Both she and her husband had many friends and acquaintances among the more reputable sadhus of the district, both of the more conservative and what might be called the more progressive type with ideas on missionary activity, such as the Ramakrishna Mission. Accordingly to this family I made my way.

Gate-Crashing

Gate-crashing is not really a habit of mine and I had no formal introduction to this lady; but in these parts it is possible to call without such an introduction and in any case there were points of contact that served as a quasi-introduction, apart from our common interest in Hindu monasticism. I arrived at dusk, when I assumed that tea, if any, would be over and the evening meal not begun. It was obvious from the house and garden that they were well-to-do people. A small, bright-eyed Indian

boy about eleven years of age opened the door for me. I assumed from his dress that he was a son of the family, but it was only after I had left that I realized that I had seen no more of him; he had either disappeared or, after the manner of Indian boys, squatted unseen in a quiet corner to listen in. He was exhorted by a voice from inside not to keep me waiting outside, and I entered through a small porch directly into a large lounge or hall, where I found the lady I was seeking seated before a tastefully arranged and well-laden tea-tray, with her husband at one side. The only light came from a shaded standard electric lamp in a corner, and its soft glow revealed a room furnished in western style, in such quiet comfort and good taste that except for the two huge bowls of glowing charcoal on the floor in the middle, one might have been in the drawing-room of an English country house. It seemed aeons since I had been in such a room, and after introducing myself I sank into an easy chair and accepted the tea offered with considerable un-sadhu-like satisfaction.

My hostess, for such she had now become more or less perforce, was a slight, ascetic-looking person of middle age who proved to be a woman of wide reading and experience, with broad sympathies and shrewd practical judgement. She had lived many years in the district, knew personally the outstanding figures among the sadhus, including some to whom I had been referred; and she received visits from some of them. She had been a Christian; perhaps she still was; or perhaps more likely, if one must give it a name, she saw no essential difference between Christianity and Hinduism: and that, for all practical purposes, is Hinduism. She knew the literature and teaching of the Hindus. It is clear, therefore, that she was peculiarly well fitted to give me the information I needed; it might also be possible to discuss with her those points of Hindu teaching on which I required further enlightenment. Her husband, who at first left the conversation entirely to her, towards the end treated me to a lengthy disquisition on Hindu mysticism, but the effect of this was rather spoiled by the frank admission in conclusion that it was for him a purely academic exercise rather than a matter of practical politics: *video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor.* I was to meet this attitude more than once.

Alas! I had brought my lamp to the Himalayas looking for a

true yogi, much as Diogenes walked the streets of Athens at midday looking for an honest man: and it seemed I was fated not to find one. True, honest men seeking God, earnestly looking for the light, but not one who had actually reached it. Perhaps it was not to be found at all within Hinduism, and that was in fact to be the inescapable conclusion: that it may carry them on a certain way and give a certain receptivity to the light, but the light itself comes from elsewhere. But this is to anticipate.

It soon became clear that my hostess had never met or heard of the type of yogi I was seeking. In fact I doubt if genuine, sheer sanctity had come within her horizon at all, or if she had any clear concept of it as distinct from mere goodness and a high degree of respectability. The intensity of an Elias or a John the Baptist would probably have seemed to her sheer fanaticism. I am sure the unhygienic habits of a Benedict Joseph Labre would have shocked her profoundly, while his mentality would have been to her a sealed book. I think it certain that she had never come into personal contact with anything approaching sanctity; the perceptible operation of a power outside man, controlling him (yet not without his own free consent) and raising him beyond himself. In fact it was becoming increasingly evident to me that the statements of modern exponents of yoga,[1] that it was not supernatural, but merely natural, or at most preternatural, were to be taken literally; that the strictly supernatural plane as revealed to Christians was unknown to them. Yoga could not, and in fact it was not expected that it should, raise man to a supernatural plane, produce sanctity as the Christian understands this; the preternatural, the 'astral', the spiritual perhaps—though I was still seeking evidence of this—but the supernatural? Although words such as 'saint' and 'divine' are commonly used, they seem to mean, on the word of yoga itself, no more than an extension of the natural powers by natural means. In fact I was at this stage still searching in vain for examples even of the siddhis, extraordinary—though not, by their own claim, supernatural—powers.

My hostess did not know of a real yogi in my sense of the word; she did not know one who had reached perfection even as described in their own terms; it now appeared that she knew and had heard of no one who had any measure of these siddhis.

[1] Cf. p. 44. But see p. 230.

Perhaps I should repeat here that I am by no means sceptical in such matters and was surprised that I had found no evidence of the existence of psychic and preternatural powers of one kind or another in a more than usual proportion among practitioners of yoga. I am prepared to believe that it *may* be possible through the development of man's ordinary natural powers to accomplish such feats as those described by Patanjali. I am ready to admit it as conceivable that one man might in this way attain to dominion over the whole visible world, making it appear and disappear at will like some cosmic magician. But even all this is still on the natural plane; the supernatural continues to lie beyond it, and no man can reach it by his own effort, by expansion of himself: he must be carried out of himself. To a Christian, as I have already suggested, it is clear how all such speculations and aspirations of the Hindu mind, ultimately the urge to transcend its own human limitation, find their completion and fulfilment in the Christian revelation. It explains especially that deepest Hindu intuition that God and man are one and the same which leads sometimes to such odd conclusions. To the Christian, man *is* indeed the continual manifestation and operation of God outside Himself, only the Christian is conscious of coming from outside himself, so to speak; as having his cause beyond himself, as not existing of his own right and power: he is not himself the cause of his being. The Hindu—taking his words, that is, for what they say rather than for what they are obviously trying to say—finds nothing outside himself; he himself is the cause of his being: he is God without any distinction. His only problem is to convince himself of this, to realize it: and to realize it mentally is to realize it on every plane of being.

I have not the least doubt of the truthfulness of this lady in saying that she knew of no one with the siddhis. I am quite sure that she would have been only too glad to be able to tell me 'tales, marvellous tales'; it would, for one thing, have satisfied her creative and artistic instincts as a writer. Only as an honest woman she could not. But she did her next best. She told me a story of an incident she believed to be true, not strictly relevant to my purpose and, as will be seen, explicable by coincidence, telepathy or hypnotic suggestion, or by a combination of these.

The story concerned a man who wished to become a sadhu after the death of his wife but was unwilling to break finally the

bond with his wife which would be involved in his becoming a sadhu; he wished, as it were, to take his wife spiritually with him on the rest of his way. After much wandering he was led to a guru who showed him his dead wife (at least the man was satisfied that he had seen her there in bodily form) and became a disciple of the guru. He was convinced that his wife was still with him and would continue to accompany him. This is obviously a far cry from flying thousands of miles in a moment of time without benefit of jet planes, of appearing and disappearing at will, and the rest. I mention it as an indication of the best my hostess could produce, to show that she was willing and even anxious to help me.

The two sadhus she considered to be most advanced spiritually were among those I had already intended to visit, but there was no suggestion at all that they were acquainted with such phenomena.

This lady wholly approved of the type of monastic community I had helped to found at Purandhar, the 'contemplative' community without direct work, missionary or other, outside the enclosure. This, she felt, would 'radiate invisible vibrations' and so affect people from within themselves, doing its work invisibly in this way. It would in particular attract those with similar vibrations, who require just this form of religion. This idea of 'vibrations' will be met again and is reminiscent of the latest theories of physical science. It also, as we shall see later,[1] is conceived as something physical and material, with again the reminder that for the Hindu the specifically material element is maya, illusion. Anyhow, as used by this lady it is roughly parallel to what Christians would call the use of such monasteries by God as a channel of grace or divine life for the district. For her, however, the form such religion took was of no consequence (and this too was logical enough from the Hindu premise); it depended on the needs of the individual. This too we have already noticed as typically Hindu. The idea seemed to be that

[1] P. 250. It is interesting to find the new president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at its latest session (August, 1960) reaffirming that according to our present knowledge the electron still appears to be the ultimate unit of matter, indicating its location only by waves or vibrations—an energy, that is, unseen in itself but visible in phenomena produced by its waves or vibrations.

monasteries of different creeds and different wave-lengths would send out different vibrations and these would be picked up by those who were tuned in to them. (Everyone, in other words, takes what appeals to him; and if all differences are illusory why not, after all? Except that it is a dangerous doctrine, with devastating results.) So her sister, she said, had recently adopted a religion which for her personally had no attraction at all; still her sister had found happiness in it and so it was right for her.

In this connection she was quite sure that no Hindu could consider Christ as in any way unique as the Incarnate God: as one incarnation, yes, suited to western peoples; but there are other incarnations, all equally incarnations of God, better suited to other peoples. Christ is only *one* incarnation. This was what I was told generally. Later I was to drive this to its logical conclusion in discussion with a swami at Rishikesh by compelling him to admit that a monkey capering on the verandah near us was equally an incarnation of God. There was in fact no difference between the monkey and God; the difference was only in our way of looking at one and the same thing. There is, as we have seen, a very real element of truth in this, but without proper distinction and qualification it is liable to lead, and does lead, to inextricable confusion; it is, however, such confusion in the literal sense and lack of definition which is the characteristic note of Hinduism.[1]

She disapproved strongly of the missionary activity which imposed western ways of dress and style of living and disrupted the social and cultural life of the people. In this I entirely agreed with her and assured her that this had never been the official policy of the Catholic Church; the essentials of Christianity were as fundamental as human nature itself, but they could be

[1] Perhaps the simplest way for the Christian to visualize the essential distinction between the one Incarnation and innumerable 'incarnations' is to regard the latter as sharing in the One, as limited individual participations in this, either prefiguring it or continuing it. (Since time and space are operative only on the visible plane it is no difficulty that historically the Incarnation took place after some of the 'incarnations'; beyond space and time it is nevertheless their source.) All men—and even, in their degree, all created things—are in this sense 'incarnations' in varying degrees of perfection of the one Incarnation, the One Incarnate God. Again the line of descent as supplied by the scheme of the Pseudo-Denys is useful.

clothed in an infinite variety of shapes and colours. She appeared to be mistrustful of material progress, fearing that this would lead to a weakening of religion. Here I think she showed a little of the romantic spirit. It might be a little ungallant to expect logic from a lady, or I might have pointed out that she and her husband were living at a level beyond the wildest hopes of the ordinary Indian peasant, one that had been reached only by very considerable material progress.

It was her experience that sadhus deteriorated once they acquired disciples and organized themselves into regular monasteries. At the highest level usually were those who lived by ones and twos. I think there was a deal of truth in this. Certainly monastic communities in the West usually experience their golden age in the first few years of their foundation and this level is rarely maintained for long, though there may be periodical temporary revivals. Contrary to what my swami in Banaras told me, she assured me that some sadhus do work; many have large estates and sell their produce on the open market. When I enquired about this later from sadhus in the district I was told that it is true; but my impression still is that work is no essential part of their life. It is undertaken, in so far as they may do it personally, only through necessity, and is more distinctive of new trends in Hindu monasticism such as that of the Ramakrishna Mission.[1] These latter did have an ashram in the Almora district, but like so many others they go to the plains in the winter, and when I was there only four were in residence.

The conversation did not always keep strictly to the point, but I had learned what I came for and gained also many valuable insights into Hinduism: I could not expect to find a yogi in Almora, not in the sense defined. Having stayed as long as I decently could I thanked my hostess and took my leave.

Himalayan Ashram

On looking back and thinking it over I feel that the central point of my enquiry in Almora, perhaps indeed the climax of my whole journey, was my visit to the two sadhus mentioned by my European hostess as being the most spiritually advanced known to her. It was from them that I received the definitive answer to my enquiry. I was sure at the time that it was the

[1] Cf. p. 299.

right one, and nothing I saw or heard since has led me to change this opinion: 'Saints are no more common in India than they are elsewhere; if in the course of a long life one should meet a single person who has had a glimpse of the light, it is very much.' Of the siddhis, the preternatural powers described by Patanjali, they knew nothing. They had never met anyone or heard of anyone who possessed such powers. They thought in fact that these were not powers that regularly developed in the normal course of spiritual progress towards realization. They might occur, or they might not; this was partly at least dependent on the natural temperament, and spiritual progress could not be measured by the possession or lack of such powers. They believed that such powers could never be a permanent possession for use at will, but might be given transiently for some special limited purpose. This is, of course, the normal Christian attitude to such matters, but it is not at all the impression given by a reading of Patanjali, nor was it the interpretation of the other sadhus I met. However, it seemed generally agreed that desired for their own sake, for the satisfaction of selfish ambition or a thirst for power, such abilities could be a positive hindrance to spiritual progress. Thinking over this later I came to the conclusion that these two sadhus were thinking of the development of such powers as a consequence of spiritual progress in general; they had not in mind the practice of the specific yoga technique aimed deliberately at the development of such power over the visible world. The point is, they knew of no one who possessed such powers.

It would be unjust to give the names of these two sadhus or their exact location, since they do not encourage visitors; still less do they desire publicity. To this extent they are true yogis. This is not to say that they are inhospitable: far from it. They did in fact welcome me, although I arrived unexpectedly without any introduction, invited me to share their meal and pressed me to stay the night, or even several nights; or to come again. But this was because they knew that I had not come from mere curiosity; I had come to learn. Like them I was looking for the light; I was a monk as they were; my form of life and their own were essentially the same, so that we met on common ground and our discussion was literally a monastic 'collation' or 'conference'.

I noted that to their own Hindu sadhus who might visit them they offered sufficient to fulfil the reasonable demands of hospitality, while not calculated to encourage those whose primary hunger might be rather for earthly sustenance, illusory as that might be, than for the higher spiritual pastures. At a little distance from their own ashram there is a small open-fronted building for the use of visiting sadhus, where they may receive shelter and meals for three days. It seemed to be implied that after three days they should either move on or declare their intentions.

These two men were quite exceptionally well fitted to help me in my quest had it been possible to find what I was seeking. They were well read in both Christian and Hindu philosophy and religion, and could speak of both from inside knowledge. They were educated men of culture and refinement; they knew the classic Christian mystical writings.

Were these true yogis in the sense explained? God alone knows; it would be presumptuous of me to attempt to pronounce a certain judgement, but the purpose of the book requires me to express an opinion or at very least to record an impression. I am sure they were true yogis in the sense that they were sincerely seeking God and had left all things in order to devote all their energy to the quest. I have their own assurance that they knew nothing personally of preternatural or supernatural powers and I should judge that to be true. I think they have probably reached a certain degree of contemplation that is not yet what Christian mystics call 'union', and they themselves would call 'realization' or yoga, or the Buddhist call 'enlightenment'; but that they are on the road to it. If they persevere, following unflinchingly and without compromise the light they have, I am sure they will reach it: but by that time they will be Christians, even though their external conformity may not correspond in accidentals to contemporary Christian practice.

Perhaps I may be permitted to attempt here a description of a small personal experience. Everything in India is so very 'different' that it is extremely difficult for the westerner to transcend external accidental trappings, which do not really matter, except that they are useful for his personal comfort and peace of mind, and attune himself to the inner reality. Here for

the first time I was able to enter so completely into the inner spirit of Hinduism that I was able to discern the exact point at which Christianity and Hinduism might, viewed from a little distance, seem about to coincide, when in fact this is the point of separation and increasing divergence. Such experiences are strictly incommunicable and one can do no more than indicate the circumstances, the external circumference of them.

There is recited in Catholic churches, after each low mass, a prayer calling on Michael the Archangel, leader of the hosts of heaven, to 'thrust into hell Satan and all wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls'. Those of my readers who know the history of the introduction of this prayer may discern a subtle irony in the fact that the prayer was continued after the immediate reason for its introduction was discovered to be unfounded; the fact that Satan had not been directly present in the particular form feared was a still more cogent reason for the prayer: this very deception which had led to the introduction of the prayer was itself the work of the powers of evil, all the more dangerous by the very fact of being so elusive.

From close on an average lifetime's experience of evil in myself and in others I have not the slightest doubt that this prayer is to be taken in the most literal sense of the words, that many of the actions of men generally considered to be good men, and who in fact are on the whole good men, not so much obviously immoral acts due to a transient falling away as actions based on false principles that have far-reaching and disastrous effects, are directly due to the inspiration of the powers of evil, of 'Satan and all wicked spirits'. Because the old, anthropomorphic conception of the devil, 'auld Hornie, Satan, Nick or Cloutie', is now out of fashion, and it has been discovered that men themselves are capable of no mean amount of devilry without direct satanic assistance, it is sometimes assumed that the devil has no influence over human affairs; at best there is a tendency to minimize it. In this lies the greatest danger, of not realizing that a certain action, course of action, or attitude to a certain set of circumstances, not on the surface blatantly immoral but based on a false principle, may in fact be a giving over of oneself to a power or influence which is in its origin diabolic. The more direct intervention of diabolic influence is

less dangerous just because it is more easily discernible. It is also less frequent, though there are instances of it that seem to be established beyond reasonable doubt. A European bishop in India, a man of shrewd judgement and long experience—and missionary bishops tend to be a hard-headed race—told me of incidents that he felt could be explained no otherwise than by direct diabolic possession.

I think it would not be incorrect to say that all our deliberately wrong actions, not least those in which we knowingly allow ourselves to be influenced and led by a false principle, the 'lie in the heart', are minor forms of diabolic possession, voluntary acceptance of a diabolic inspiration. Its most radical form is that 'sin against the light' of which Newman, 'amid the encircling gloom' of his spiritual crisis in Sicily, protested he had not been guilty, while obviously fearing that he had. In the rough and tumble of life on the plains wrong and right in their cruder forms are usually discernible easily enough. On the heights, the nearer one approaches to the source, the distinction is not so easy, yet it is at this source that the later activity has its origin. It is commonly realized that those who are called upon to direct and advise people who have advanced far in spiritual matters require consideıable discernment in order to know if their charges are being led by a good or an evil spirit. The distinction at the stage where it first emerges into consciousness, when it first, so to speak, assumes a visible shape and form, may be so slight as almost to defy recognition; but the effects, as it proceeds further and further down into the world of human affairs, can be devastating, should the wrong decision be taken.

The Hindu view seems to be that every spiritual activity, every thought, sends out vibrations, like the ever-widening ripples caused by a stone tossed into a lake, until it emerges into the words and actions of the material plane; and the closer to the source it is, the stronger and more pervasive will the results of such thought or spiritual activity be. However crude and material the concept may appear the principle is perfectly sound. Ultimately it is at the level of the spring of the very being of the individual, where his own being and consciousness arise, that the vital issues of the world are decided.

There are occasions when an angel of light and the devil

suitably adorned, are almost indistinguishable. The experts say that while both inspire terror at the first impact, in the first case this is succeeded by a feeling of peace and well-being, in the second the fear persists. I imagine that many people have experienced moments of almost panic terror at the almost palpable presence of evil. There is a verse of one of the psalms[1] which reads: *Omnes dii gentium daemonia* ('All the gods of the heathen are demons [or devils]'). It is recited at least once a week as it comes round in the regular rotation of psalms in the Church's choir office. It is, however, one of the passages that in this eirenic age tend to be explained away, as do also what are called the 'imprecatory' ('cursing') psalms which so profoundly shock some Christians. I do not personally believe that the gods of the nations, the gentiles, the 'heathen', are in fact literally devils; I believe that these are the nearest the people concerned are able to get to the true God; and anyway no created form can adequately portray the 'image of the invisible God'. But I do believe that to the degree in which they diverge from the one true God as revealed in Christ they are the work of the 'Father of Lies', and *to that extent* their worshippers are, unknowingly and not willingly, labouring under his dominion; and it did occur to me repeatedly in India that if chaos and confusion are, as they are said to be, a note of diabolic influence, then the utter confusion and chaos of Hindu religious thought and practice, and the bewildering profusion, not to say moral character, of its gods might here at least justify one in singing with a clear conscience: *Omnes dii gentium daemonia.* Here in this ashram I felt for the first time that I could really see and appreciate it from the inside or, by my original metaphor, at its source, the point at which the element of truth, the positive element in it, became distorted and confused. It was during the temple worship that I saw this.

I had established an immediate contact with these two sadhus; in every sense of the word we spoke the same language. Nowhere else had any aspect of Hinduism made any appeal to me; I was able to consider and assess it rationally, but nowhere was there any reaching out of the heart, any instance of seeing

[1] *Psalm* xcv. 5 (in the A.V. xcvi. 5). So the Latin Vulgate version. The Anglican version has, more diplomatically, 'All the gods of the nations are idols.'

something of myself reflected in it, of finding myself, any sense of union with the ultimate, of being at home, *in patria*. Men have experienced something of this towards the end of the night vigils in a freezing monastic choir, at the triumphant outburst of the *Te Deum*. Archbishop Ullathorne in his *Autobiography* describes an experience of this kind when, late in life, he assisted at the vigils of a Trappist community in Ireland. He had himself aspired to such a life in early youth, but his path had been cast in another direction. It is evident, both from his words and his omissions, that he had caught a glimpse of the true home from which circumstances had withdrawn him, and he recalls that the blazing fire supplied by his host on his return was for a long time insufficient to reconcile him to his normal world.

My hosts asked me, with some diffidence since they knew I could not take any positive, formal part in it, whether I would like to witness their midday temple service or *puja*, which immediately preceded lunch. I was, of course, accustomed in my own monastery to the short choir office of sext at noon immediately before the midday meal. I gladly accepted—I had never seen this service at close quarters before—and squatted in the doorway of the tiny temple. In the Vishnu rite observed here the priest stands towards the side of the altar, the left-hand side facing it, instead of directly in front, so that I was able to follow his actions closely: the offering of incense symbolizing the spiritual self; the offering of the five lights, the five senses; the elements of water and earth, the world; cloth, the external clothing or manifestation of the soul—all these offered in a circular motion towards the altar, from the altar and back to it. At the same time the great brazen gong in the dome above boomed, throbbed and vibrated, its waves spreading out, engulfing and embracing all within its orbit. As I squatted there, receptive to all this, I found myself with a start fitting into position almost as though I had been there before, it was all somehow part of me and I knew just what was coming next. After the *puja* at the altar of the temple the priest carried incense to the ashes of his guru in a small shrine opposite the gate of the temple, similar to the practice in a Christian monastic church where at vespers, after the incensing of the high altar, incense is carried to the other altars of the church.

As I squatted there, engulfed by the booming and vibration

of the gong, I experienced a momentary approach of that panic that seems always to accompany contact with the Holy—and with the diabolic. I am not sure even now which it was in this case, or even if it was either; but I saw clearly the point at which the true and the false so nearly coincide as to be almost indistinguishable: and I saw which was the true and which the false. I had to make an effort to prevent myself from being completely absorbed by this ritual. On the whole I wanted to go, and I did not in fact stay the night. Over the door of the temple was an inscription (in Sanskrit) from the Bible: 'Come unto me all ye who labour, and I will give you rest', but it had already been pointed out to me that the 'I' in this case was the 'One' and the invitation was to 'realization'. The invitation was not from Christ; was it from 'The Lord of the World'? Frankly, with the qualification with which I began, I am not sure; but in any case this must not be interpreted as meaning that I thought these two sadhus had gone to the devil in the ordinary sense of the term.

Did I wish to describe my experience at this temple service in the Hindu manner I would no doubt say that Christ (or possibly Michael—'my guru') appeared to me in a blaze of light—here appropriate setting of the scene and stage directions —and revealed to me through the haze of incense a hideous black form, the Lord of the World—here full description—which he prevented from approaching to snatch me away. To the Hindu mind this would be strictly truthful: the product of his mind, and other unseen things, are more real and more true than mere material things. To my western mind, appreciating the artistic possibilities of such a situation and the increased sales of a book that contained a judicious selection of such incidents, it does not, unfortunately, seem possible to present the matter accurately in this idiom.

These two sadhus had been initiated in a Central Indian ashram to which they were now affiliated, but, they told me, there was no regular organization and no real authority exercised by the parent ashram. Should their teaching and practice become unorthodox (and this, of course, could mean only opposed to that of the mother house, since there *is* no accepted body of doctrine) then there might conceivably be a note of protest; but apart from that nothing could be done about it.

It remains to be seen whether such sadhu associations with central headquarters as that already mentioned may eventually modify this and bring about in time a central control. My own feeling is that, if it does so, it will weaken Hindu religion whose very strength lies in its fluidity and impatience of definition; that it can swallow anything and take on any form yet still remain the same. Should it once be reduced to a form, or a formula, then the inadequacy of the form will be only too obvious.

There were others who came to try the life but, as they said and as I knew from experience to be true also of the West, contemplatives or yogis, even in the ordinary sense of those who are prepared to devote their whole lives to the quest for contemplation, are extremely rare. Most of those who come are entranced by the sublimity of the life and by the peace, order and beauty of the natural surroundings, but few are able to stand it for more than a month; and for most even a few days is more than enough. There had been an English doctor with them for a longer period than usual. He too left, of his own accord; but had he stayed a major crisis might have arisen. The local people began to come for medical treatment; more and more came; a small dispensary had to be built; eventually one or more monks could have been well employed the whole day at this work alone, had they been free from all other duties and had at their disposal an unlimited supply of expensive medicines to dispense free of charge. In other words the end for which they had come to this spot would have been incapable of attainment—or would it? Perhaps certain limited hours could have been assigned for consultation and treatment; but then Indians are prepared to come and wait patiently a whole day, and even if necessary overnight, and one cannot have people dying on one's doorstep or even see them lying about without food. The same problem was arising on a small scale in my own ashram, but there it was resolved by the simple fact that I was due to leave at a certain stage of development. It is perhaps worth mentioning that there is not, except in rare cases, any sign of gratitude for such service, though peasants may pay ten rupees or so (a week's wages) to one of their own sadhus or medicine men for a little charm and incantation in case of illness. It is just something 'they' do for some inexplicable

reason, and heaven alone knows why they don't charge for it; presumably they are a bit queer in the head. In the case of Europeans dispensing such medicines it is probably regarded as all part of some deep, sinister foreign plot.

These sadhus did, then, accept others who aspired to their way of life, but they were strongly of the opinion that sadhus tend to deteriorate in proportion as they organize and form into large communities. The same problem has been expounded to me by the more contemplative type of Christian monk. On the other hand they clearly had not much sympathy with the great mass of sadhus who were always roaming. I have already mentioned their admission that sanctity, as distinct from just exceptional goodness, was as rare here as it is in the West (which, incidentally, they did know at first hand). They were of the opinion too that the true contemplative, not in the sense of one who has 'already attained', as I have explained, but as seriously devoting his life to the search, is also as rare here as in the West. This was the conclusion I had reached as the result of my own very limited experience in India, confirmed by enquiry of various religious superiors among Christians.

Many of the sadhus were, on the other hand, genuinely good, earnest men, though these two admitted that there was this general tendency to start from the outside, 'to be called holy before one is so', to put on the war-paint, don all the trappings and parade in public in the hope that going through the motions will eventually produce the corresponding internal dispositions, to put on the *persona* in the hope that it will form the character represented, to build a vast façade before one is quite certain what is going behind it. Regarding religion in general they thought—and in this I wholeheartedly concurred—that there is in India a perception of God and a true valuation of religion and of spiritual values to a far greater degree than in the West, yet with no greater influence on the conduct of practical affairs than in the West—and this too was confirmed by my own experience. I have just mentioned one business man capable of discoursing on high spiritual doctrine, and ending up ruefully: 'I wish I could practise it. I know I ought to, but I don't.'

The general plan of the life in this ashram resembled closely that of the 'normal', traditional Benedictine monastery. The

whole life revolved round the temple services which were held at regular times during the day, primarily dawn, midday and sunset, and everything led up more or less directly to this temple worship and existed for it. The office at dawn was preceded by a period of private prayer. There was a minimum amount of this for all; the maximum and the precise form of it was decided by the guru, the 'spiritual director' of each. In general it consisted of what in the West is included under the heading of 'meditation' or 'mental prayer'. I noticed that prayer beads were used.

They confirmed that a guru does in fact assume full responsibility for the sins and failings of his disciple. In return he exacts perfect, implicit obedience, and wherever in the world he may be the disciple at *puja* pays formal honour to his guru, living or dead. The guru of these two men was a woman, formerly a housewife. This is not at all uncommon; there is at present a well-known female guru in India with a group of disciples who has received a certain publicity, some say notoriety; anyway I was assured that I should not find there what I was looking for.

These two sadhus do a certain amount of manual work; in fact on my arrival I caught one of them bending over some wooden contraption at which he was hammering vigorously. I had wound my way uphill to the ashram in the cool of the morning through two to three miles of fragrant pinewoods and was warm and glowing with the exercise when I arrived; but he had pulled on a very western-looking woollen pullover over his saffron gown, since the morning was cool at this altitude of some 7,000 ft. I found later that his companion was at this time busy cooking the dinner. There were no servants but the place was clean and well-kept, and the trim garden with its green lawn and flowering shrubs might have been the setting of an English country vicarage. The meal, taken of course squatting on the floor and eaten with the fingers, was simple, well-cooked, pleasant and adequate in food values, and I ventured to compliment the cook, having known myself something of the problems of housewifery.

Their work, as in the 'normal' Benedictine monastery, was directed exclusively to the upkeep and development of the life of the community, except in exceptional cases of the demands of charity as, for instance, of the dispensary already mentioned.

These two had more than sufficient with the upkeep of the house and the provision of some of their own food. Wheat, I found, grew well at this height. Their conception of work was essentially that of a Benedictine community; to secure their own independence and seclusion by providing the necessities of life for themselves, so far as possible, and to re-establish through manual work a proper harmony between body and soul. They agreed that once a regular rhythm of life was established work involved no necessary break with prayer, but led to a state in which action was simply the material reflection of prayer, work was prayer. They themselves did not actually express it in this way; in fact I thought I detected a very slight tendency to apologize for the fact that they did work and occupy themselves with a material world that was but maya and illusion; rather they accepted this suggestion readily as a justification for what they were doing and intended to do in any case.

Although, like the Banaras *mutt* (ashram or monastery), they had no conception of benefiting the world beyond themselves, they seemed to show a consciousness of being somehow of value to the world outside, on the plain beneath, identical with the Christian concept of keeping open a channel between the invisible world and the visible through which life and reality can flow; at least by the sheer witness of their lives—and on occasion perhaps also by direct interposition—fulfilling the office of 'prophets' in the literal etymological sense of looking into the invisible and 'speaking out' in word and action what they see there. This again they did not say; it was only suggested to me by a couple of phrases used by one of them: 'following the light' and 'holding up a lantern', reminiscent of Shakespeare's 'good deed shining in a naughty world', or of Dante's:

> O light uplifted from all mortal knowing,
> Send back a little of that glimpse of thee,
> That of its glory I may kindle glowing
> One tiny spark for all men yet to be.

(I quote from Chesterton's translation.) This, there can be little doubt, they were doing.

In the course of a long discussion that lasted until lunch-time, and continued for a time beyond that, I put to my hosts a

few leading questions that had been carefully prepared before I set out on my journey, among them such as are of more direct practical importance for the ordinary man:

'Do you believe that there is for man a continued conscious personal existence after death, or is it just oblivion, an endless sleep in an unending night?'

'Yes, there is; it is not just oblivion.'

'Am I right in thinking that this world is not for you (as so many popular expositions of Hinduism say) just pure illusion, but that maya does imply a degree of reality, of real existence?

'Yes, it is not mere illusion.'

I am condensing here what in fact involved more questions and answers in order to ensure that each understood what the other was talking about. I asked a further question of one of the sadhus which he, realizing all its implications for a Christian, said he would not like to answer immediately: Did he believe that after what we call death the body and a material world would still remain, and indeed remain for ever? One can well understand his hesitating to reply to such a question without time for consideration. Its connection with the preceding questions is presumably clear, It was after lunch that he said he thought he might attempt to answer my question. 'Yes,' he said, 'when the consciousness is turned towards God, there is nothing but God; when it is turned away, then there is the material world.' 'And the material world,' I asked, 'includes the body?' 'Yes.'

I would have liked to debate this answer, but I was already on my way from the ashram; the sadhus were accompanying me part of the way and I could hardly detain them longer. It is certain that this reply would not have pleased all the sadhus I had met and was to meet. It implied, for instance, the continuance of man as a separate personality distinct from God. It contains a curious echo of the hierarchical scheme of the Pseudo-Denys,[1] whom this sadhu had not read, of man receiving his world from God as he faces one way and projecting it in the shape and matter of the world below him in the hierarchy as he faces the other way, God present throughout as the being and existence of it all. His answer could, of course,

[1] Cf. p. 29 and note to p. 184.

have been an evasion, carefully prepared as it was and given at this precise moment, possibly born of a desire to meet me half-way; but I think it was sincere enough and consistent with Hinduism properly understood. I suggested that it might be better to regard it not so much as a continual turning from one to the other, a rhythmical rolling of heads such as one may see in spectators of a Wimbledon tennis match, as rather the very being of man consisting in a simultaneous facing both ways, now and forever: his facing towards God as in itself the facing towards or production of this material world. Looking within himself he finds God and looking outside himself he still finds nothing other than God, but in this simultaneity there is a certain reflection of the immanence and transcendence of God.[1] He seemed to find this satisfactory but, as I have said, it was not possible to debate the matter.

I discussed a number of minor matters, one, for instance, which was not quite clear to me at that time and may not be clear to my readers: Yogi and sadhu are commonly taken in popular books as interchangeable terms, and in so far as a sadhu is by profession one who is seeking 'yoga' or union with God, this is fair enough; the sadhu is the professional yogi in that sense. But there may be yogis who are not sadhus, yet are truly seeking union or realization. I asked whether sadhus as a body regularly practise yoga, in particular the physical exercises, the *asanas*, *bandhas* and *mudras*, and breath control.

These two swamis told me that they themselves used yoga only in so far as they found it useful, and they thought this was true of sadhus in general. They regarded it as a purely natural, physical preparation for prayer, an aid in controlling the body so that this would not obstruct the working of the spirit. In the context of Christianity this consists of regaining a control over the body, restoring a harmony between soul and body, lost by the Fall. It will be perfectly realized only with the resurrection of the body, but is gradually approachable even in this life; in its perfection it will include perfect control by the spirit of the body and the physical world which it inhabits. (This last is my own comment.) The two sadhus agreed that the calming, harmonizing and concentration of the faculties that could be produced by yoga—as also by other means—might on occasion

[1] Cf. p. 121.

(though in fact it rarely did) lead to the emergence of preternatural and psychic powers inherent in all of us but normally submerged through excessive concern with the external senses. Phenomena such as clairvoyance, telepathy, second-sight, wraiths in remote areas such as the Scottish Highlands and parts of Central Europe, where the physical surroundings and the slow regular rhythm of life tend to withdraw the soul within itself, are probably random, involuntary exercises of the powers which yoga attempts to release deliberately and systematically.

These sadhus agreed with me that these and still more spectacular phenomena had no necessary connection with religion; that they are, or at least can be, purely natural (or preternatural in the sense of unusual). This, as we have seen, is the attitude in India generally towards yoga; it is approached as a purely natural science to be studied and practised scientifically with all the latest scientific gadgets. Study of it at such centres as that at Lonavla, half-way between Bombay and Poona, seems designed to demonstrate and even emphasize the fact of its purely natural character without any religious significance. So the *Times of India* of May 31, 1959, describes an experiment at Lonavla which claims to prove that it is possible, with proper breath control, for a man to remain alive in a sealed, air-proof chamber for fifteen hours *without* entering into samadhi (trance). In another place (Dehra Dun) I heard of a man who was dug up alive after being buried for six months (here in earth, not of course completely air-tight). He was disinterred in the presence of doctors and civic officials, and there seems to be no doubt about the fact: I had it from several independent people.

The current issue of *The Observer*, as I write, exhorts its readers in an advertisement complete with a glamorous picture of a film star doing physical exercises, to 'Learn Yoga . . . a practical six-weeks Home Course'. And complete for 21*s*. 6*d*. (only £1 for cash down). It assures the potential client that 'Yoga is not a religion', but neither is it 'a course of gymnastic instruction'; it is 'a technique for achieving union of body and mind —bodily health, calmness of mind, longevity'. It is written by one with the impeccably Indian name of Indra Devi with an introduction by one with the not so Indian name of Yehudi Menuhin.

As I have remarked, there does seem an anxiety to prove that these things have no connection with religion, are purely natural—and no one is likely to quarrel with that. But it is also possible today to discern this tendency to go still further and to say that there is no supernatural at all,[1] that all is a natural development and evolution of something that is in man already. This can only appear to the Christian as atheism, and if the Hindu prefers to call it pantheism, or to refuse either name and assert that it is simply an expression of his doctrine that man and God are one, others could find it indistinguishable from dialectical materialism. We come back to the impossibility of defining Hinduism. The Christian, starting from his clear distinction of natural and supernatural, God and man, Creator and creature, and his sense of the transcendence of God, finds his thought immensely enriched by the emphasis of Hindu philosophy on the presence of God in man, his immanence; but once detached from the security of the Christian standpoint it is very easy to use this as the basis of a religion which would begin: Thou shalt have no other gods but man. When a Hindu uses his lofty, high-flown phrases, quoting from his sacred books, we must always ask him what he understands on this point—and it is unlikely that he will be able to tell you. I wonder what the Communist hordes would make of it if, which God forbid, they were to swarm down into India?

These two swamis, then, used yoga as what Christians would call a 'natural' aid to religion; remembering that since Christ united natural and supernatural nothing is any longer merely natural. They did not practise the yoga physical exercises except that they found the so-called 'lotus posture' (squatting on the ground with the legs folded beneath one) a useful mode of sitting for prayer and meditation. Clearly this is a healthy posture, though a bit hard on elderly limbs for those who have not already become accustomed to it. The weight is supported by the spinal column which is held straight, and it has the advantage that, with the legs locked beneath the body, it is

[1] As I have said (pp. 44 ff.), the problem is to know whether the meaning is that all we call 'supernatural' is already in man, 'natural' to him, and simply requiring to be released or 'realized', so that there is nothing 'outside' and beyond man, no room for a transcendent God, no room for God at all in fact in the Christian sense. Cf. also p. 239.

impossible to fall over in the event of trance or partial trance or even, for that matter, if one just falls asleep. Even here it should be noted that the *Bhagavad Gita* recommends that for meditation one should choose a seat 'neither too high nor too low' (I quote from memory; this is the sense). This can only mean a low seat such as a low chair or stool or high cushion, not a seat on the ground such as the 'lotus posture'; in fact the low seat that most people do find most comfortable. These sadhus also find *some* breath control exercises useful, but they do not spend long at this. The advantage, they suggested, is that one who has accustomed himself to some measure of control of breathing and suppression of breathing will not be disturbed should he experience a degree of ecstasy or trance with temporary cessation of the use of the faculties.

This small ashram represented, I think, the highest manifestation of Hindu monasticism that I found; probably the highest that was to be found. This was the highest level I reached on the spiritual plane, as it was also geographically. I was about to descend to the plains, more accurately to the point at which the Sacred River descends from the hills and begins its course over the plains. Since these two swamis had been so forthcoming and there was a bond of sympathy and understanding between us, before leaving I told one of them that I intended to visit Rishikesh (perhaps the greatest and most populous of all centres of organized sadhu life). I asked what I might expect to find there and in particular what they thought of Swami Sivananda, his ashram and Vedanta Forest Yoga University. The swami seemed a little taken aback; he hesitated, turned away and was silent for a moment. Then he said: 'I am afraid you will find there the seamy side of sadhu life.' It was very plain that he was ashamed of it as representative of Hindu monasticism, yoga and Hinduism in general. He was at first a little distressed that I was going there, then admitted that it was perhaps just as well that I should see it. (As I have said, it is through such centres that yoga, Hinduism and sadhu life are generally known to people from the West—through visitors, literature sent all over the world, and the missionary travels of its representatives—while the better type of sadhu remains comparatively unknown.) This swami, not with any bitterness but with much feeling, used such phrases as:

'religion become a business', 'food tickets for sadhus', 'degradation of true religion', 'pandering to the popular taste for the spectacular'. Of Swami Sivananda himself (described by his own devotees as 'the highest living incarnation of God' and, more simply, just as 'God') he said: 'I think he means well, but this kind of thing does a great deal of harm to true religion.' (It has been remarked that the worst thing one can say of a man is that 'he means well'.)

It did not seem likely then that I should find at Rishikesh the true yogi I was seeking; Rishikesh had in fact been portrayed to me by others already in less restrained terms. Still, since it is perhaps the yoga centre best known to western devotees and indeed to non-Indian devotees in general, it seemed important that I should visit it and obtain an impression at first hand.

On taking leave of them I said I thought that their philosophy did not admit the notion of praying for one another. One of them, varying the formula slightly, said: 'We will remember one another in His Presence.'

Tibetan Lama

Before relating my experience at Rishikesh one other visit, to a Tibetan lama living in the hills in this district, is worth recording. I had to walk all the way to this man's cell, in some respects a less wearing experience than travelling by bus. In fact it was in Almora that I experienced what was perhaps the most uncomfortable bus journey, 'upper' or 'lower' class, that I can remember. Perhaps I should not complain; the little guide book lists the road I travelled over only as a 'bridle path'. It was bumpy and covered with a thick layer of white dust that rose in dense clouds into the air, so that the driver had to stop at intervals, rather like a ship at sea in a fog, until it cleared sufficiently for him to see his way. The narrow road followed the contour of the hills, with an abrupt drop of hundreds of feet at one side and a wall of rock rising sheer on the other. I have travelled on similar roads before and am not abnormally nervous. I think the driver did know his job, and at certain spots he exercised what seemed to me almost excessive caution, but time and again as we skidded round a wall of rock and I glanced at the gulf yawning beneath me and wondered vaguely if there might be anything coming in the opposite direction,

I found myself involuntarily clutching at the back of the seat in front. At frequent intervals, and noticeably at the most precipitous and serpentine approaches, there were stacked at the roadside, leaning against the cliff, large numbers of thin stone slabs of uniform size, about four feet by two and a half, smoothed and polished, which the nervous traveller might have been pardoned for thinking were headstones, set there by some thoughtful philanthropist in readiness for the premature and unprovided graves of future travellers. Alternatively they might have been marking the site of former tragedies, much as, in the south of Germany, one erects crosses on the heights from which men have fallen to their death. On further reflection I thought they might be intended as paving stones for the floors of houses and I saw later that smaller, unpolished pieces of the same rock, which seems to flake naturally into neat slabs about one inch thick, were used to roof the small peasants' cottages in the district. Only when re-entering Almora on the return journey from this particular expedition did I notice that an enterprising insurance agent had erected a large board at one side of the road, painted in three colours and advertising in two languages 'Life Insurance' at especially attractive rates.

Christian sacred scripture says that one who enters the sheepfold otherwise than by the gate is a thief and a robber. I must confess right away that I entered the lama's ashram by climbing the wall. Having reached, after a very pleasant tramp through the hills, the place where the lama was reputed to be living, I made enquiries of two people I met on the way and finally arrived at what probably was the lama's house. But I could not be sure of this. Set on a hill in the woods was a brick wall about five feet high in which was a gate of the same height of what seemed to be sheet metal painted dark green, with no knob, key-hole, bell or knocker visible. Above the wall I could see only a plantation of small fir-trees. It could have been the surroundings of a lama's *pied-à-terre*, though it looked altogether too neat, prosperous and business-like for your average sadhu or lama. It was only later, on my way back, that it occurred to me that there was something a little unusual about this gate. My host—for such he now was—had taken me down to the gate but in fact stopped a hundred yards or so short of it and bade me goodbye, saying that I should find it open. Open in

fact it was, though it had been firmly shut before, and happening to look back at it as I descended the hill I saw that it was again shut. I can only assume that there was some ingenious mechanism that operated by remote control. Perhaps that supplies some justification foı climbing over a gentleman's wall.

Looking for a way in I walked a little way round the wall but could see no other entrance. It *would* have been possible to climb the gate, or preferably the wall in order to avoid damaging the paint on the gate, but one hesitates to pay a formal call in this way; besides, could it be that this building of a wall round oneself with no obvious means of entry or communication was a way of indicating that visitors were not received? From one standpoint this might provide an added reason for persistence in trying to see this lama (if it was his home), but first I must ensure that I really had come to the right place. I remembered noticing a small cottage close to the spot at which I had left the road and, retracing my steps to this, now found a man sitting outside it. In reply to my question he waved vaguely up the hill in the direction from which I had come, then, apparently on second thoughts, offered to take me to the lama—for a consideration. I agreed and he led the way.

He had obviously been there before and knew his way about. He led me straight to the wall I had just left and round it by a different way to a section which had fallen down, or been broken down, a foot or so and unhesitatingly climbed over, inviting me to follow. It seemed, as I have said, a rather unconventional way of entering a gentleman's garden, but possibly the lama was accustomed to receiving visitors in this way—certainly my guide seemed to think so—and I followed him without more ado. He led the way through a small wood to a freshly-painted small trellis gate in a hedge surrounding a small attractive brick bungalow in a garden bright with flower-beds and pots of flowering shrubs and, beyond the gravel path, a small stretch of green lawn. Planted in the middle of the lawn was a tattered Tibetan 'prayer flag' on a tall pole.[1]

My guide went to the open door of the bungalow, made a

[1] The inscription on this is expected to operate on much the same principle as the mantra (cf. p. 250), broadcasting its 'vibrations' to all capable of receiving them. The flag must remain in position until it disintegrates, disappears from the visible world; hence the tatters.

deep bow and entered, while I stood at a discreet distance hoping that he would do something to prepare my way. There followed what was evidently a little altercation, a voice that I afterwards recognized as that of the lama's attendant alternating with that of my guide. At what I judged to be an opportune moment I interposed my own voice and this led, after a short exchange, to the sound of another voice, that of the lama, inviting me to enter. My guide came out and received his reward; I entered and he went off grinning. The first voice told me with a slight asperity that the visiting hours were after 4 p.m. (it was now about 10 a.m.), but nothing could have been more charming and gracious than the lama himself when I introduced myself and made my apologies. We had common interests, one or two common acquaintances, and when I left he asked me to call in if I should ever be in the district again.

He sat cross-legged on a cushion placed on a small platform or dais raised a few inches above the surrounding floor, in a bright, attractively furnished room lined with books. Before him, on a low stool, was a typewriter. He was engaged on his correspondence and excused himself while he finished an urgent letter which had to be despatched by bearer to the nearest post office some miles away. He was an elderly man with thin, wrinkled, ascetic features with a little straggling white hair at the chin, and in his wide-sleeved blue-and-gold embroidered gown seemed the typical Tibetan Lama, or, as it struck me at the time, Chinese Sage, and the very personification of contemplative wisdom. In fact he was a German and also a properly initiated Buddhist lama. He was a scholar in the full sense of the word, with a keen, critical mind. He was widely and deeply read, had travelled extensively and had lived a number of years in Tibet; it was there that he had become a lama. Since his English was very much better than my German we spoke in English.

There was much more give and take in this conversation than there had been in most of my previous ones and he was as eager to seek information from me as I from him. He was obviously pleased to meet one with whom he could discuss matters of common interest. Among other subjects he opened he said he would like to take the opportunity of asking about the exact meaning of the recently defined teaching of the

Catholic Church concerning the Assumption (i.e., of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven). He wanted to be quite sure that he had understood this correctly; did it really mean that she was assumed into heaven body as well as soul? I told him that it did. This interested and pleased him very much for, he said, it confirmed his own belief. He added that he thought something essential had been lost when the 'Reformers' of the sixteenth century rejected devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Without any direct reference to this, though no doubt unconsciously inspired by it, I asked him at a later stage of the conversation whether he, and Buddhists in general, believe in a continued *bodily* existence after death. He replied: 'Yes.' We agreed that man was neither body nor soul nor just a junction of the two, but a unique body-soul being and that, whatever change this might undergo, the body-soul complex would remain, the whole man, in a continued conscious existence.

We spoke of Thomas Merton, the American Trappist monk, whose books on the contemplative and monastic life have become 'best-sellers' throughout the world, and of Padre Pio, the Italian Capuchin Friar, who has the stigmata, the bleeding nail-marks of the Crucifixion, in hands and feet and is credited with preternatural (supernatural?) powers. He had met a priest who knew Padre Pio personally and had seen the stigmata; he thought it 'very interesting'. He found it perfectly reasonable that, since Christians live by the life of Christ and his life is continued in them, some of the external characteristics of the life of Christ should also appear; even, on rare occasions, to this extent, the marks of the crucifixion in their bodies. He showed himself to have a clear conception of the Christian doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, and indeed of the more profound Christian truths in general, and he probably felt—this was the impression I gained—that there was no essential difference between his belief and mine.

We discussed many points that are outside the subject of this book: The number of Protestant sects or quasi-sects, disagreeing among themselves yet all claiming to take their teaching from the Bible; the principle of authority in the interpretation of revealed truth and the need of a chosen body in an unbroken line of succession to whom the power of interpretation was transmitted. He even raised the question of a

vernacular liturgy and thought this was not desirable; that the language of the liturgy was not the language of every day but a sacred, hieratic, sacramental or *mantric*[1] language, which should indeed be explained carefully, word for word, to the ordinary people, but should never be the speech of common life.

In addition to my main object of travelling around with my lamp 'looking for an honest yogi' I hoped to get some information here about Indian Ayurvedic medicine; whether it was basically the same as Tibetan medicine, based on the conception of man as a microcosm. He told me it was and that he could recommend me an excellent book on the subject, the best he knew: he had a copy. This proved to be a book I already knew, though I had not had an opportunity then of studying it: *Tibetische Medizinphilosophie* by Dom Cyrill von Korvin-Krasinski, a monk of the Rhineland Abbey of Maria Laach, who had made an intensive study of the subject and produced this abstruse work. This book proved to be a common link, for we both knew Maria Laach; I had studied philosophy there many years before and planned to call there on my way back to England.

I had already asked, no longer very hopefully, about the 'true yogi' and yogis with quasi-preternatural powers and shall return to this later. The mention of Tibet had for the moment reminded me of a most enthralling book I had read just before coming to India. It claimed to be a biography, a strictly factual account of life in a Tibetan monastery, with special reference to the occult. This book had an exceptionally large sale, has aroused considerable comment, and I am continually meeting people who have read it 'with eyes popping out', as one of them assured me. This seemed an excellent opportunity of eliciting some first-hand information about the preternatural and occult generally in Tibet and possibly also about this particular book. To the average Westerner Tibet is above all the land of mystery where almost anything might happen, but I wondered if I should find occult phenomena any more common in Tibet than in India.

I asked him if he happened to know the book. He replied: 'Indeed I do; it is a complete hoax.' He went on to declare that he was surprised that a reputable firm of publishers should

[1] Cf. p. 250.

publish such a book and he had written to them in protest. Such books, he held—and surely with justice—did a very great disservice to true religion. He had also written reviews roundly condemning the book. A film company, he told me, had approached him as an authority on Tibet, with a request that he would act as specialist adviser for a film version of the book, but 'I flatly refused to have anything to do with it'. He believed that in consequence of his attitude the idea of a film version had been dropped. As a scholar and scientist, he said, he clearly could not say without careful detailed investigation on the spot that any one particular incident mentioned had not taken place, but that knowing, as he did, the country, the people and the places mentioned and the generally inaccurate and fanciful nature of the work, he felt justified in saying that in general it was entirely unworthy of belief.

I mention this as just one instance of a book that did arouse very great interest and achieved an exceptionally wide circulation on which I was able to get first-hand expert information and establish as a fraud. For obvious reasons I cannot give the name of the book. I am reasonably certain that the great majority of such books would not withstand systematic impartial investigation.

The lama, as I had by now come to expect, could not tell me of anyone who had attained to 'realization', a true yogi in the sense I have defined. Nor did he know anyone who had acquired preternatural powers such as those described in the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali. Referring particularly to the claim to be able to travel through the air thousands of miles in a moment, he said the only case he knew at all resembling this, though obviously not the same but of a quite different order, was that of a man in Tibet who, when in a state of deep abstraction or semi-trance ('contemplative state' was the actual expression he used, but I think this is what he meant), was able to travel overland at a quite extraordinary speed, so that metaphorically, almost literally perhaps like some human 'hoverplane', he might be said to be 'flying' over the ground, his feet not appearing to touch it. (There may be a certain parallel between this and such phenomena as the walking on water of St. Maurus,[1] and possibly also the 'fire-walking' of certain

[1] Cf. p. 164.

South Sea Islanders and the inhabitants of a district in Northern Greece.)

As he said, this was not of course a use of the siddhis, but something of a quite different order. I mention this as an indication of the type of man I was talking to: the scholar who wishes to be scrupulously accurate in his assertions; the siddhis had not come within his experience, but he felt obliged to mention this as qualification of the statement that he had met no such quasi-preternatural phenomena. Speaking of this 'space-travel' of the yogis, not as the highest of the siddhis but certainly one of the most spectacular and with a certain topical interest, he produced a theory that is worth considering because I was struck immediately by the obvious truth of it, even if it may not have been the whole truth.

He said that in a state of profound contemplation (not amounting to trance but a considerable degree of abstraction from external sights and sounds) one may experience a sensation of flying, *as though* the soul had soared aloft, taken wing and were present somewhere else, 'in the clouds' or where you will—'whether in the body or out of the body, God knoweth'. He himself knew of no case of *bodily* travel of such a kind; but if the soul is many thousands of miles away, does it really matter very much whether the body has accompanied it or remains where it was, particularly if the body is, in any case, maya or illusion? [1] Anyway, when one is in such a state of abstraction, how is one to know whether the body has accompanied the mind (or the soul)? One is no longer conscious of the body. On returning to oneself one may find oneself in exactly the same position as before, it is true; to another person present it might seem that one had never left the place; but if it all happened in a flash, a moment, would one be missed, any more than a single blank on a reel of cinema film would be noticed? From this it is not a very big step to asserting that actually one has travelled through the air a few thousand miles and returned in a moment of time.

[1] This was said by the lama with a slight smile suggesting a gentle sarcasm. He was, of course, suggesting the Hindu viewpoint, not his own: if the (to the Hindu) essential man has flown, what matter if that part, or aspect, of him that is illusion seems to be left behind? However, the Hindus I met did claim that the whole man, body and soul, was involved.

I have expanded somewhat the lama's suggestion. He suggested no more than the *sensation* of flying, and if the body does not accompany the soul (or the mind) does it matter very much? It was clear that he did not think the siddhis were to be taken literally. Had he been less of a scholar and more of a man of the world I feel he would have said: 'Sheer imagination.'

It seems to me that the lama's suggestion, if taken rather more literally than he intended it, is substantially correct: the yogi does believe that by *imagining* a thing he can bring it about. This follows logically enough from the Hindu assumption that the *atman*, the self, the inner spiritual being, is really identical with God and co-eternal, and the apparent distinction of things that produces the world of phenomena is only illusory, maya. From this standpoint the thought of a thing is more real than the thing itself; the thing itself is what one might call the outermost fringe of the thought and the more 'interior' one's thought becomes with reference to a thing or action the more complete one's control over it until 'universal domination' is attained. Expressed crudely the 'will' to do something, to 'have it in mind', is sufficient for its accomplishment.[1]

For one who is convinced of the possibility of this and concentrates on the performance of an action or the acquisition of something, it is psychologically a very short step to the conviction that he has achieved what he wanted to achieve and has got what he wanted.[2] There is, of course, no doubt that within certain limits the mind (for want of a better word) can influence material things and vital forces and that the extent to which it can do this is not yet known. Witnesses in the 'Black Box' law suit, as reported in the *Daily Telegraph* (June 21st, 1960, and following days), claim that the 'de la Warr radionic instrument' is capable of diagnosing and treating diseases at a distance; but it appears that the power of the mind is an essential element in this. The growth of plants, it is claimed, can be assisted by thinking 'constructively' about them; the growth of

[1] This, it will be obvious, is a crude description of God's own mode of action: his will to do something is its production. 'Something in mind', the existence of a created being as an 'idea' in the 'mind' of God, *is* God himself, since God is one simple act. Produced outside himself, in the limits of space and time, it is distinct from God, but its existence in God remains the source of its phenomenal existence in the created cosmos.

[2] Cf. p. 298.

weeds, on the other hand—nettles were mentioned—can be arrested by thoughts aimed at discouraging them. The connection between mind and thing is spoken of in terms of 'waves' or 'vibrations'. I mention this as showing that such ideas are not confined to the East.[1]

I suggest the explanation of this claim of the yogis to control the whole world of phenomena, the body and its environment, by the power of the spirit, is the feeling that they can *almost* do it already and it is just a question of bringing to realization something already almost there. The ultimate basis of this is, it seems to me, simply the *potentiality*, the innate thirst in man, for the qualities and powers of the resurrection body, powers that should be innate in man, are lost since the Fall, leaving a void calling to be filled, and are an element of the restored humanity offered with grace through Christ, which will have its final fulfilment only after death.[2] There can be no doubt at all of the universal experience of such feelings or 'intimations of immortality'; they are the common theme of the folklore and fairy stories of the world. The late Abbot Chapman, in his empirical approach to the question of 'mysticism',[3] suggests that our knowledge of how pure spirits (angels) think and act (he is thinking of the very long tract of St. Thomas Aquinas *de angelis*) is based on the feeling that '*we can almost do it ourselves*', that our knowledge and experience certainly go far beyond the words we use to express them. The *feeling* that our knowledge does not come *from* material things or through the senses but otherwise, that sensible knowledge is simply a reflection in material form of what we already know in a higher way, that we always have a half-feeling that 'we have been there before'. This, he suggests, is because this 'angelic' mode of knowledge is still possessed radically by the human soul though it is in a state of atrophy. I am obliged to quote from memory but I think I have not misrepresented the Abbot's thought.

St. Augustine long before seems to have been describing a

[1] Mr. Luther Burbank, an American horticulturist, claims to have bred thornless cacti by talking to them in tones of love, telling them that they no longer needed thorns to protect them. I recollect that Mr. T. S. Eliot in *Burnt Norton* speaks of roses that have 'the look of flowers that are looked at'.

[2] Cf. p. 47.

[3] Printed as an appendix to the original edition of *Spiritual Letters*.

similar experience in the pages of the *Confessions*, when he tells us that in his approach to the Church and the higher mode of knowledge that is infused at initiation he 'saw that there was something to be seen that he was not yet able to see',[1] in other words that he *could almost do it.* I have sometimes wondered (since it is this one power of 'agility', instantaneous motion, that we have singled out particularly) whether this may explain the sensation so many people experience on top of a precipice or high tower, that they could jump off and go soaring over hill and plain, combined with the sometimes overpowering impulse to try it.

This, I suggest, is the truth underlying the lama's remark, this and the flamboyant, exotic, imaginative style (not of Patanjali, who is epigrammatic, but) of so much Indian writing: and of course the conviction that the idea, the thought of a thing is more real—and so more true—than its material form. I have before me at the moment of writing a book, with a wide circulation, that claims to be the autobiography of a yogi (not the book already mentioned above which I discussed with the lama). It is literally packed with 'tales, marvellous tales': A beautiful maiden floats through the air at dusk and alights before a devotee; her days are spent in ecstasy in an underground cavern on the banks of the Ganges. A palace is made to materialize in the Himalayas. Christ appears to a swami and tells him that Christians have got it all wrong. Alas! He is born to put it right. A man is commanded by a guru to throw himself over a precipice. He does so, is considerably broken, carried back, restored to life immediately and made whole and sound. A man dies of cholera and is restored to life by the administration of seven drops of castor oil—and so on.

My Poona friend, the Indian priest who is a Hindu student and student of yoga, when asked for an opinion of this book, replied with admirable brevity: 'Pukka bogus.' I would like to

[1] *Confessions*, Bk. vii, ch. 10. He goes on to describe it as a 'strong light' that 'beat back' his sight, i.e. blinding rather than giving sight since he had not yet the special faculty of sight adapted to it. So too the Pseudo-Denys and, a later writer in the same tradition, the fourteenth-century Greek Kabasilas (*Book of Life in Christ*), for whom at baptism not only the 'Light' and the 'Perfume of the Chrism' are given but also the faculties to perceive them, described later as 'the reception of new members (limbs) and organs' in preparation for the life to come. (Cf. St. Paul's 'spiritual body' and the 'sheaths' of the yoga school.)

emulate the discretion of my lama friend and say that I have no right to say these things have not happened until I have investigated them on the spot. I think I will go a little further and say that I claim the right to doubt them without ocular demonstration. For the present, as an aid to interpretation I would suggest that when we are told that 'My guru appeared to me in a blaze of light etc. [with much circumstantial detail] and commanded me to carry the secrets of yoga to the U.S.A.', we should read: 'The idea came to me that my guru would like his teaching spread more widely. Americans take to this sort of thing very readily; so what about it?'

I feel obliged to note in fairness to my Indian friends that this *mentality* is not unknown to the Christian West. Many of the medieval legends of saints are, as I have said,[1] of very questionable authenticity; some of them are no longer accepted by reputable scholars and a number have been expunged from the breviary, the Church's official prayer-book. They have, of course, never been matters of faith; one could believe them or not just as one pleased; they were pleasant stories with a moral; they grew up as legends still grow up in the glow of the turf fire; they certainly *could* have happened; such things *do* happen; the saints in heaven can do much more marvellous things now —well then! It was the same mentality that inspired the forging of documents to confirm a quite genuine right to property or office: the right exists; you are simply giving it a material form. Or the ascription of one's own writings to someone with greater authority. St. Thomas teaches that the truth, by whatever agency it is taught, is taught by the Holy Ghost. This *is* true: does it matter then whether A or B is the *agent* of it? I am not defending this mentality, only trying to indicate its existence. Assuming that the bulk of the marvels in the book I have mentioned are indeed 'pukka bogus', I am sure the author would be genuinely surprised and hurt if you called him a liar.

I would not like it to be thought that I consider powers such as the siddhis non-existent in this life. I am sure that the extent to which our natural powers can be developed is not yet known. For the moment I merely place on record that so far I had not found any evidence for the existence of such powers among yogis: but I was ready to be convinced, and I believe

[1] P. 164.

such things can happen. I incline to be a little dubious of the implied suggestion in modern books on yoga that the latest discoveries of physical science were known to yogis thousands of years ago. It may be, and again I am open to conviction. I think the philosophical foundation of such theories was known to them and especially the concept of the dominion of mind, or spirit, over matter, to the extent expressed by a modern scientist such as Sir James Jeans, that the material world is a way of regarding something that is essentially spiritual, a communication of mind with mind. Modern physical science itself seems to be rather the realization of what all people at all ages have always believed they *ought* to be able to do. Some of the possibilities that at this stage hardly go beyond the bounds of science fiction are strangely reminiscent of the powers of the resurrection body. A few years ago, for instance, it was seriously suggested in the press by a well-known scientist that the normal method of travel in the future might be the resolution of man into a number of centres of energy which, according to this theory, are his ultimate elements, the transmission of these as one might transmit a television programme, and the reconstitution of the man at the receiving end. A film entitled *The Fly* has, I understand, more recently provided a graphic example of some of the hazards of this form of space flight. (The power to dematerialize and materialize, appear and disappear at will, is of course one of the powers claimed by advanced yogis.)[1]

A soul in a state of separation (permanent or temporary) from the body (or possibly even in a state of deep abstraction, even momentary) should in theory be capable of assuming a body in any place it chooses, and it would be interesting to know whether the few authentic cases of bilocation (and perhaps 'wraiths' come under the same heading) are to be explained in this way. Whether such an operation is regarded as the confrontation of others with a 'material' body or simply, as with the perception of 'material' phenomena in general, as the manner in which the spiritual presence of the person 'bilocating' is perceived, must depend on the theory of physical science preferred.

[1] Most yogis claim to do it in this way, some assert today that it is only the 'astral body' that travels while the gross physical body remains *in situ*.

In the Christian Church (and, as we have seen, to the better type of sadhu) the possession of such powers in our present existence is not to be considered any index to sanctity. The practice of the virtues, a good life to a heroic degree, is the only criterion. Before a decree of canonization, declaring that an individual who, by this criterion, seems likely to have achieved sanctity and perfect realization in heaven, is in fact now in heaven, two 'first-class miracles' are normally required as clear signs from God. In a context in which there can be no possible doubt of the connection between cause and effect God is asked to show by clear signs that a person is now in heaven, is a 'saint'; the sign is given—or it is not given.[1]

Downhill

As I have already said, the highest point of my journey, both geographically and spiritually, was reached in this district of Almora. My further journey was in every respect a descent to the plains. At Rishikesh I was to find the popularization of religion, the attempt to make its higher teaching accessible, and acceptable, to the ordinary literate man; but perhaps the French 'vulgarization' does convey better to English ears the impression given. It is not so much a question of presenting a high spiritual doctrine in terms everyone can understand. Christianity does this, presenting the essential truths of religion in formulas intelligible to the youngest child yet opening vistas that are for ever widening and retreating before one, making explicit what was before possessed implicitly—'folded up'. The process here was rather the reverse. There was no question, I was to find, of forming a synthesis or simple formulation of Hindu doctrine, of bringing down to earth, in that sense, the spirit conceived in the silence of the hills. At this point you are invited to come from the plains and go up higher, but in the process you can believe 'any damned thing you like'. The grossest animism, idolatry and superstition, any and all religions are here welcome as so many steps to higher things, stages in a development that is to extend over many incarnations and aeons of time.

[1] Even in this case the ultimate basis of such a declaration is not the miracles (the need for these is sometimes dispensed with) but the divine guidance guaranteed to the Church in the fulfilment of its office.

I am mainly concerned here with the 'popularizing' and missionary establishments at Rishikesh, but it is obvious that, in the mind of the Almora sadhus I met, the other monastic establishments at Rishikesh are also in the precarious position of being suspended between the plain and the heights, spiritually a kind of suspended animation or, by a different metaphor, neither hot nor cold. I hesitate to say, in the words of the two sadhus I have spoken of, that the kind of 'vulgarization' to be found in such centres is 'the degradation of true religion', but what I saw of it appeared to me infinitely dreary, failing on the one hand to present to the ordinary man (or perhaps the man who is a little above the ordinary) the necessary clear and safe path to the heights; on the other hand, when it is prepared for export to the West, pandering to the popular taste for the marvellous.

Although sadhus do in general tend to go to the plains during the winter, there were still a number of them about in Almora, and the village of the name seemed to be their shopping centre. Six in the space of one hour there is the greatest number I remember to have seen. Journalists, and still more camera-men, in search of the Indian ascetic, might have been a little disappointed by the homely appearance of these men. Two of them I remember, one short and stout, the other tall and thin, were obviously going shopping; one carried a basket such as a housewife in an English village might have used. Others were chatting cheerfully in the bazaar; one sat in a tea-shop reading the daily paper. The favourite addition to their usual dress seemed to be a sleeveless striped woollen pullover of Western style worn over their saffron robes and usually clashing horribly with its colour. I would have liked to suggest one simple subdued colour harmonizing with the saffron of their daily dress as less disturbing to the eye; but this might have been misinterpreted. Most of them wore socks; and rubber-soled gym shoes seemed to be the favourite footwear. Most of them looked simple, normal, healthy men; none of them was the fierce, emaciated, ascetic figure that photographers love to capture. They all eyed me closely as we passed, and it occurred to me that possibly word had gone round of what I was up to, as it does very rapidly in such a district.

Tolerance is an essential note of Hinduism, but I had been

warned that sadhus might be hostile to a Christian priest and more particularly to a monk. I had looked at a piece of land in the district that could have been made available to me for a monastery or hermitage, but had been warned that it might be unwise to settle there. Hostility might develop with the suspicion that I had come to proselytize, though I have usually found that a friendly approach tends to produce friendliness in return. All those I had occasion to approach were friendly and helpful. I do remember just one, a short stout sadhu, with the florid complexion, big jowls and calculating stare of a successful business man, who stood in the bazaar with arms akimbo watching me closely as I passed with what no one could describe as an expression exuding friendship and goodwill. Indeed I felt that had this been the Wild West, instead of the not so wild East, he might at any moment have stalked up to me and, in a speech beginning 'Say, stranger . . .', have challenged me to a duel with guns. This I would not have relished for, although I have had some experience of avoiding bullets, I am no great hand at shooting.

3. Descent to the Plains—Rishikesh

DEHRA DUN—RISHIKESH

I had arranged to make Dehra Dun the centre from which to visit Rishikesh. I was to stay there with the Irish Patrician Brothers who conduct a large school, St. Joseph's Academy, which educates a considerable proportion of the leading citizens of the district and has a high reputation. The number of photographs in the hall of former pupils, now handsome martial-looking young men, bearded Sikhs especially, who had later won outstanding distinction at the military academy, made me wonder if the fighting spirit of the Irish had anything to do with it—but perhaps that is unkind.

Very cunningly I had so organized my journey that I should arrive at Dehra Dun on Christmas Eve and so be able to spend Christmas Day with them as a complete holiday with never a sadhu on my mental horizon. As justification for this I can only plead that Christmas is, after all, pre-eminently the feast of union of divine with human, natural with supernatural. For that same reason it was also, I suppose, a not altogether inappropriate day on which to approach the problem of the translation of the unseen into visible terms, to investigate how the spirit of the Himalayas appears in material form: but I must confess that this idea did not occur to me until later. I was prepared to postpone my visit here if I found cause to stay longer in Almora; but I had a sneaking hope that I should not.

I was not disappointed in my expectations of Irish hospitality, which is surely without parallel. The pupils were on holiday so that the brothers were able to relax and sit longer than usual

over their meals, and in consequence the quality, variety and constant flow of the stories that circulated round the table surpassed anything I have ever known.

The journey from Ranikhet was long and tiring but comparatively uneventful. The distance in a straight line is not great, but travel in a hilly district is much like travel on a broken coast-line; one is obliged to follow the contours of the land. I decided that the quickest route would be by bus to the railway junction at Moradabad, where I should be able to catch the Calcutta Mail to Dehra Dun. The bus left Ranikhet at seven in the morning and, after reaching the foot of the hills, went gamely on along one of the dustiest roads I have ever known until it reached Moradabad at three-fifteen in the afternoon. ('-bad', incidentally, which occurs so often in Indian names, has nothing to do with the German 'bad' (bath or spa); it means a settlement or town. Baths in our sense of the word, perhaps in any sense, are extremely rare in India. Showers are comparatively common, but most common of all is a pail or tub of water ladled over one with some suitable instrument; a large aluminium mug is popular.)

At Moradabad I discovered that I should have to wait until three o'clock the following morning for a train to Dehra Dun. The local clergy, who lived quite close to the railway station and were busy decorating the church and erecting their Christmas crib, pressed me to stay there; but it seemed unfair to disturb them and their bearer at such an unearthly hour in the morning, so I engaged a bed in the retiring room at the station and slept there until my train arrived. I might have slept a couple of hours longer had I only known, for my train was two hours late. It was 11.15 a.m. when I arrived at Dehra Dun, where I was met by a sturdy, fresh-complexioned middle-aged brother with an accent that had clearly been acquired in County Cork, who whisked me off to the school. There I was able to celebrate mass, followed almost immediately by lunch.

Rishikesh is about thirty miles from Dehra Dun and on Boxing Day I took advantage of the offer of a lift in a private car for my first visit. A public works official, a Hindu friend of the school, who mentioned casually that he was building a village near Rishikesh in addition to a number of other schemes in the district, offered to take me with him. He would send me

back in the evening or I could stay the night in the Public Works Bungalow. He was starting early and I welcomed the offer, for it also gave me the opportunity of seeing modern small houses under construction—we called at several on the way—and how the problem of sanitation is dealt with in the absence of an adequate water supply. He was building excellent small stone cottages of two rooms (on one floor), kitchen and lavatory for a little over £300, inclusive of the land. A one-room cottage with kitchen and shared lavatory cost about £120.

This man was typical of the better type of Hindu. Educated at the Brothers' school, he was, I should judge, an extremely efficient architect and engineer and a capable and conscientious executive and business man. He was also a kindly, cultured and well-read man, and his conversation on the journey veered between building and planning (it was I who guided it in this direction) and Hindu philosophy and what we of the West could only call mysticism. Since he represented a type of Hindu increasingly common among the educated classes, who is religious yet at the same time, from a Christian standpoint, a sceptic in the sense of showing a tendency to explain everything by 'natural' causes, I shall reproduce a few points of his conversation.

The thought behind my own rather paradoxical statement is this: The reply of a Hindu to Mr. H. G. Wells' question: *Shall Men be Like Gods?* could only be: 'Men shall not only be *like* gods; they already *are* God, and there is "none other God".' It is all a question of 'realizing' this, and even in this 'realizing', 'making it real' and 'coming to see it' are conceived as essentially one and the same thing. But where the traditional Hindu attained to realization by withdrawing from the external world of illusion, the modern, by a subtle twist, tends to make the unseen and spiritual the illusion, in so far as it is 'spiritual', different in kind from the visible and natural, and to portray it in terms of modern physical science, as a quality of matter not until now properly understood. Accordingly there is no God but man, once he has attained to complete control of his environment through the discoveries of physical science. There is, it is obvious, a whole heaven and earth of difference between this and the Christian concept of a transcendent God, still transcendent while intimately united to man as man's very

being. In this concept of man as God and potentially lord of the world with no being beyond him, man has become identified with the Lord of the World who, in the Christian concept, is Satan, the Father of Lies and of all illusion. It is probably a half-realized consciousness of this that has led to the phrase I heard several times from Christians in India: 'Scratch a brahmin and you'll find an atheist.' There is obviously a dangerous similarity between Hinduism presented or considered in this way and the dialectical materialism of our Communist comrades, which could be used to good effect by Russia should the need arise. Such an interpretation also offers justification for the current emphasis on scientific research and industrialization as an aid to man in dominating his physical environment and so 'becoming God', realizing himself. After all you cannot expect much enthusiasm for material progress in a man whose whole aim is material progress in reverse, who considers the whole purpose of his existence is to get away from the material as quickly as possible. If the tendency is successful it may be the end of Hinduism; but it may easily produce another school of yoga.

My friend had himself had *darshan* (audience) of Swami Sivananda, head of the Sivanandanagar Ashram which I particularly wished to visit as being perhaps the best known, especially to foreign students of yoga, known to them either through personal visits and pilgrimage, or through the abundant literature that flows from it. He had been impressed by the fact that the Swami had told him: 'You have nothing more to learn; you *know* all you need: go and practise it.' I was later to reach the conclusion that the Swamiji's reputation was founded largely on such advice as this, spoken with such admirable circumspection. What could be more sound and sane and practical—and what more cautious? Find out what a man's conscience tells him he ought to do and tell him to get on with it; even one true line of conduct persevered in courageously will be found in time to entail all the rest. But, as my friend said, it was not so easy; and he had not really done much about it. And there precisely is the rub.

Hinduism tells him he can do it by his own unaided powers since he is God and there is nothing outside himself. Christianity whispers 'Pelagianism' and says he must have help

from outside himself, from God, and, moreover, provides him with it. Again I am not saying that the Hindu does not in fact receive help from God, however mistaken his own ideas regarding the source of his actions; undoubtedly he does, and such grace followed will lead him ultimately to the end designed by God, in spite of his own theories about it.

This man considered that certain naturally sound practices, such as fasting at stated times, had been represented as religious practices and endowed with religious sanctions simply in order to ensure that people observed them. (Some moderns tend to explain the sanctity of the cow on these lines, aimed at preserving an animal essential to the peasant's economy.) He explained on similar lines the fact that for the conservative Hindu it is the duty of the mother of the family personally to cook the family food, even though she could afford to employ a cook; she may have hired help in the matter of washing up and such lesser tasks, but she herself must do the cooking. It was all a matter of 'waves' and 'vibrations'. 'Certain waves' or 'vibrations' pass, through the medium of the food, from the mother to the recipient. I believe there is more in this than most people think. Anyway everybody knows there is nothing like mother's cooking. This sacramental concept of food, as the material vehicle of the life and love of the mother which is the true inner source of the life of her family, which no substitute can give, is sound enough, and however we explain the mechanism of it experience shows that it works. Where it fails is in attributing it to the mother as the *ultimate* source instead of regarding her as the sacramental channel between her family and the Ultimate, which for a Christian is the transcendent God; material vibrations, if you like the term, caused by something that is for ever beyond matter and vibrations.

I have already suggested that the ordinary man's view of medicine[1] seems to be that the drug itself is simply sacramental (I do not think it fair to call it a magical view), the vehicle of a spiritual power which is the real healing agent, so that the

[1] P. 20. In the case of 'mother's cooking' I think that the full explanation would run on the lines that as the being and life of the children were received from the parents, so the continuation of life and development would follow most perfectly through a continuation of nutriment on, so to speak, the same wave-length.

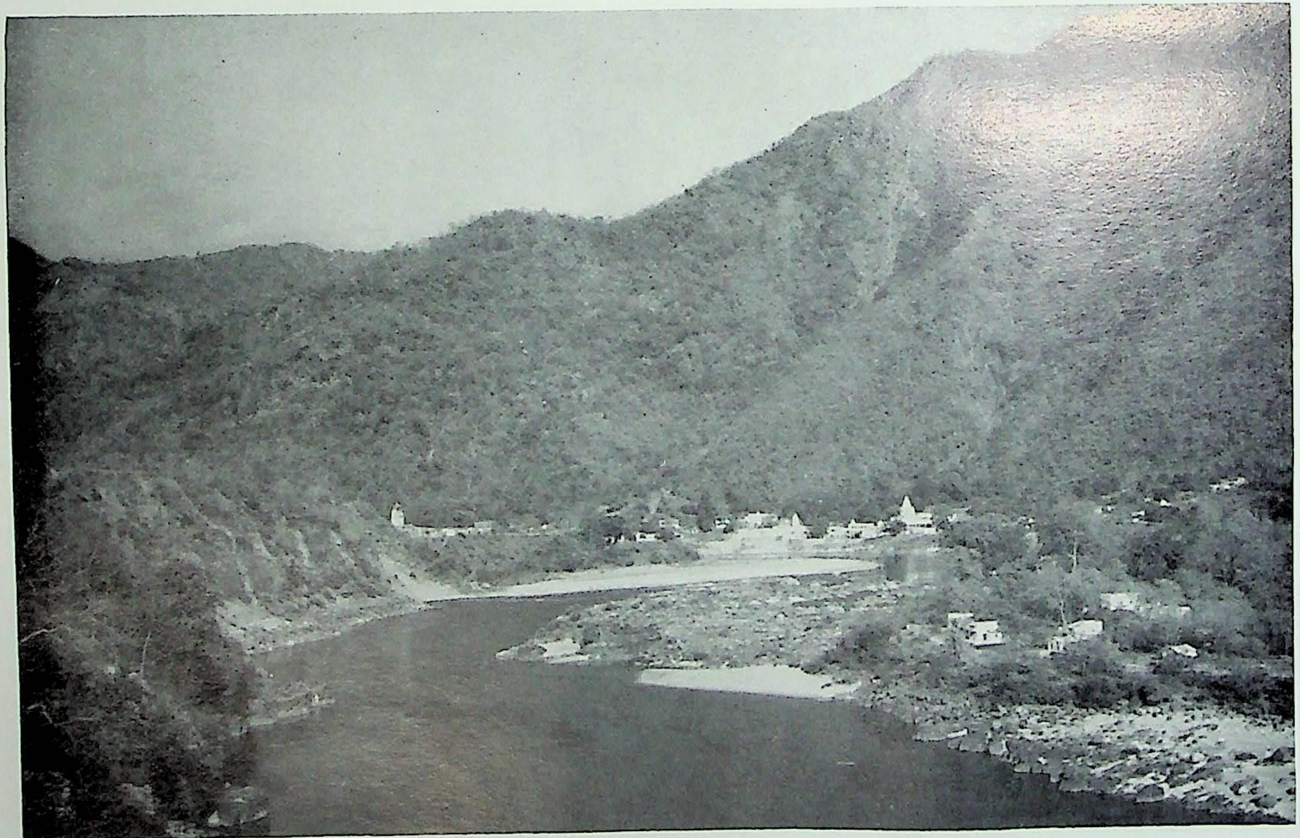
doctor is of far more importance than his remedies. So frequently, when I have told people that I had not the medicine they required, or that they needed hospital treatment, they have begged me to give them some other medicine—something, anything.

This man spoke of the water of the Ganges in a similar strain. I have already mentioned the significance of this particular spot, where the river, after its descent from the heights, begins its progress over the plain, as the reason for the unusually large communities of monks. He told me he had found by experience that by washing in the waters of the Ganges at this place he was completely revived and refreshed, no matter how tired he had been, sometimes after ten to twelve hours' work. I had the impression however that here too he attributed the effect to some peculiar quality of the Ganges water, inherent in it, that might possibly, with progress in science, submit to analysis, rather than to any spiritual power as my simpler peasants would have done, to God using this water simply as an instrument.

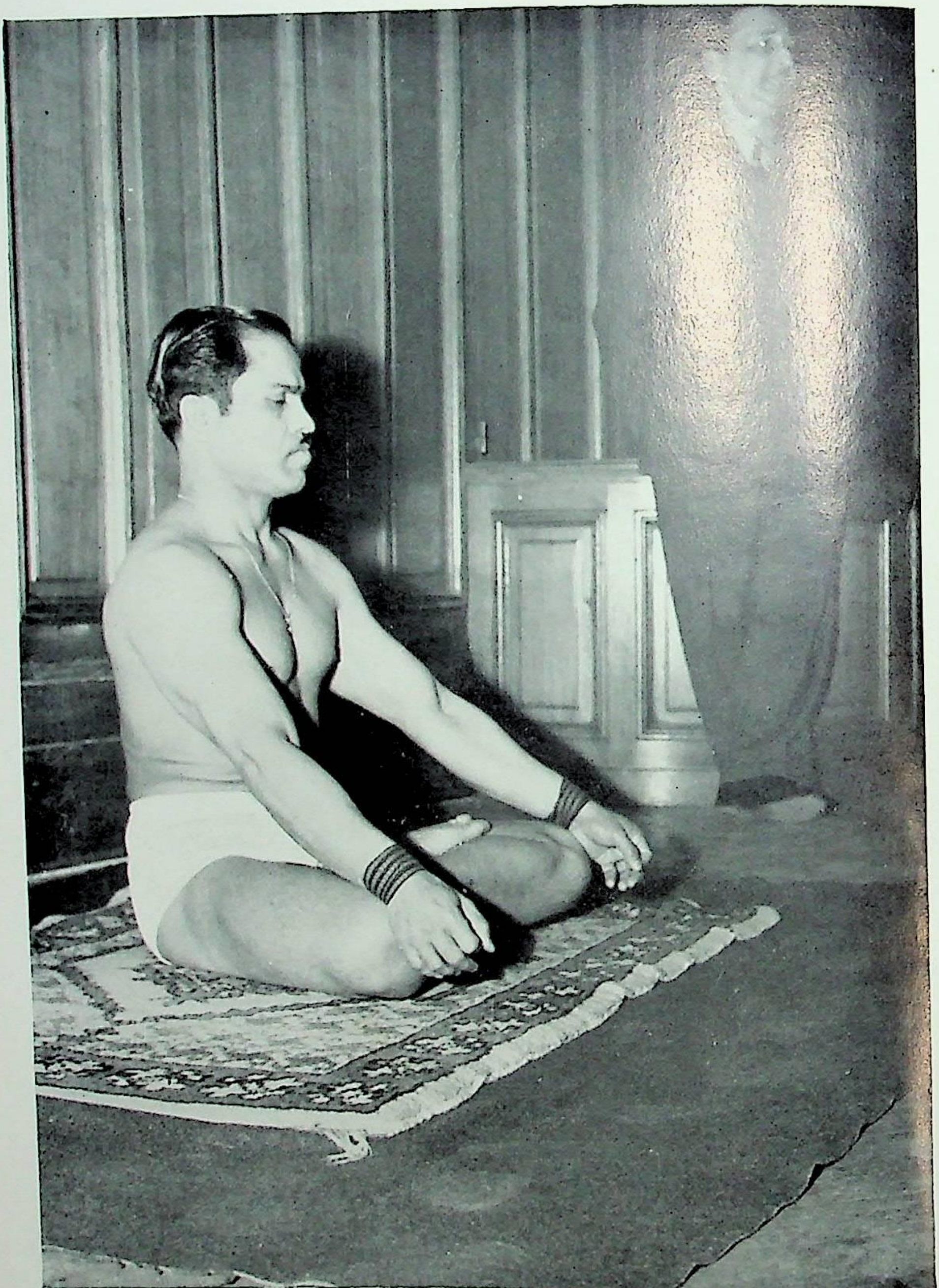
He also elaborated a theory, with which I shall not quarrel, that one's thoughts of another person affect him: 'You know, what I am thinking of you—my thoughts affect you.' Here too he seemed to have in mind some physical transference by waves or vibrations. I think he meant more than just telepathy; that one could 'wish evil', or good, to a person. Perhaps black magic in some of its forms is based on this; but whether it is the exploitation of some little-known material or psychic force or performed through the agency of an alien malignant personality, I do not pretend to know. This man's opinion of his fellow-countrymen was simple and to the point: 'The trouble with India is people are lazy and disunited.'

SIVANANDANAGAR

The group of ashrams or monasteries of which Sivanandanagar, the international yoga centre, is the best known, is situated two to three miles beyond the village of Rishikesh, in a delightful position on the banks of the Ganges where it leaves the hills, executes a turn and begins its course through the plains. I found it difficult to get a reliable estimate of the number of monks or sadhus in these ashrams, perhaps because the numbers



16. The Ganges at Rishikesh (pp. 64 and 237ff). The point at which the Ganges leaves the Himalayas and begins its course over the plain.



17. The 'lotus posture.' Recommended by yoga as the most suitable for meditation.

are continually varying through the wanderings of the sadhus. Estimates varied between one and three thousand. These ashrams line the banks of the river, each fronted with steep, wide stone terraces or steps leading down to the water. The water was not high at this time of the year and I was puzzled to see numerous planks of what appeared to be good, sound timber drifting slowly downstream and many grounded in shallows and backwaters: there were too many of them for this to be just fortuitous. This is apparently the method of transporting the timber that is cut from the forests in the hills upstream. I assumed that someone came along periodically and set afloat again the planks that had become stranded.

Sivanandanagar, in which I was particularly interested, is a hugger-mugger collection of buildings straddling the road that runs along by the side of the river into the hills. It appears to comprise the *Divine Life Society*, which I should imagine from its literature is mostly for export, the *Yoga Vedanta Forest University*, where students may come for instruction in the science and practice of yoga, a hospital and a pharmacy (this latter with a large stock of Ayurvedic medicines for every imaginable ill) as well as a heterogeneous collection of cells, offices, kitchens, guest-rooms and other ashram buildings.

The Yoga Academy or University (as I have remarked already titles are not to be taken *too* seriously in India), built on the hillside, on the side of the road furthest from the river, is the most impressive of the buildings and probably the latest. It is approached by two long flights of broad stone steps. A large orange-eyed monkey came to meet me as I reached the top of these and regarded me with a look of sad cynicism. Of the buildings below the road the hospital is the most conspicuous; between this and the river is the curious collection of buildings, shanties, narrow alleys and gateways, small shops and cafés that are the ashram. Everyone seems free to wander anywhere at will. A newspaper boy came along, trundling a bicycle which bore a plate advertising the *Hindustan Times*; young men in western dress and carrying cameras were wandering about; a cow in search of corporal, and possibly spiritual, refreshment shambled up and stood expectantly at the verandah of the guests' dining-room and kitchen, asking with her large limpid eyes what was cooking. Presumably she was fed, for I

saw her again several hours later winding her way up into the hills, looking quite content and, one hopes, well on the beginning of her path to realization by way of a higher incarnation. It was all very casual, untidy, good-humoured and rather squalid. The motto, on a commemorative tablet near the entrance, ran: Serve: Love: Give: Purify: Meditate: Realize. Quite a programme.

Because of its contacts with the West it may be worth while inspecting this ashram rather more closely. It began in the classic style for ashrams and monasteries everywhere, eastern and western: a single sannyasi who attracted a band of disciples and became a guru and, in this case, eventually conceived the idea of a mission to the whole of mankind. Critics might perhaps say that, also in the classic style, deterioration began with the increase in numbers and with publicity; but, as I have said, I would hesitate to call it 'the degradation of true religion' as did my two sadhus in the hills. I have no doubt that, had I stayed longer and poked about a bit, I might have uncovered less reputable aspects—this is inevitable in any human community—but from the Hindu point of view of all religions leading to God the teaching is unexceptionable, and there can be no doubt of the spirit of kindliness, friendship and hospitality —of charity. Its external form was not one that appeals to me, but that may be my limitation.

The head, founder and moving spirit of the whole is Sivananda, the name, that is, by which he is known now as a sannyasi. To this is usually affixed the title *Swami*, given to sadhus in general, so that Catholic priests in India who wish to be as Indian as possible are Swami rather than Father. In origin it appears to mean no more than 'master', has acquired gradually the connotation of 'spiritual master' or 'teacher' and in its restricted sense refers today to duly initiated monks; sadhu and sannyasi are more general terms for ascetics. In front of this may be placed 'Sri', meaning 'holy', though it is commonly used as a secular title meaning little more than our 'Mr'. To swami may be added *ji*, *swamiji*, making this a more courteous, respectful title: so Gandhi is usually Gandhiji to good Indians. In some of the literature of the ashram Sivananda is given additional titles, for instance: Sri Swami Sivananda Maharaj, which is as much as saying King of Swamis. Some-

times, not to be outdone by any lesser ecclesiastical luminaries, all this is preceded by 'H.H.' or 'His Holiness'. In other places he is referred to as 'Saviour Divine', the 'Highest Incarnation of God' or, more simply, just as 'God'. He is commonly depicted with a halo. For the sake of brevity he shall be referred to hereinafter as Sivananda, intending no disrespect.

He was born on September 8th, 1887, near Tinnevelly in Southern India, of brahmin caste. On his own admission he was 'extremely mischievous in his boyhood'.[1] He got into trouble with his parents as a boy for taking fencing-lessons from a harijan (untouchable). His reply to this was to go to the teacher with the garlands, sweets and prostrations usually given to a guru. He studied medicine at Trichinopoly and practised as a doctor in the Malay States for ten years. It was his experience of sickness and suffering here that led him to ask (rather as Buddha did) if there was anything beyond a life that amounted for so many to a hell on earth. He decided to devote his life to a search for the answer. When he considered that he had found the answer he decided to communicate his knowledge to other men. It is the familiar course of men who 'find religion' and conceive that they have a message for the world.

He settled at Rishikesh in 1924 as a sannyasi, one who has renounced the world, gathered a group of disciples, and in 1932 founded the *Sivanandashram*. His desire to impart the fruit of his experience to others—'this knowledge had immediately to be shared'—led to the foundation of the Divine Life Society in 1926. It is principally through this society with its constant stream of books, pamphlets and periodicals and its branches 'all over the world' that his work has become known in the West. In 1948 came the Yoga Vedanta Forest University, and in 1950 he 'undertook the epoch-making All-India Tour' in order to spread his message. The crown of his aspirations seems to have been an attempt to draw all religions into his scheme (an aspiration of which the religions themselves do not seem to have taken very much account): in 1945 he attempted an 'All-World Religions Federation', in 1946 an 'All-World Sadhus Federation' and in 1953 'convened the World Parliament of Religions'. Unfortunately some of the religions of the world seem to have missed this event.

[1] *Light, Power and Wisdom* (Sivanandanagar, 28th ed.), p. 113.

Such high-sounding names and pretensions are, as we have seen, not to be taken at their face value; or perhaps more accurately 'face' is the value at which they are to be taken, the 'make-up' and imposing façade which are so characteristic of the East. It is not uncommon to see a small wooden shack ten feet by six advertising itself as 'The International Steel Syndicate'—and why not, in a country where everyone is an incarnation of God and carries the whole world within him? Again, to place this in its true perspective we must remember the lengths to which publicity and advertising may go in the West, particularly in the U.S.A. where the breaking down of 'sales resistance' has been reduced to an exact science.

His own sketch of 'How God came into My Life' from his book *Light, Power and Wisdom*, is also enlightening. 'It would be enough,' he says, 'to dismiss the question by saying . . . the Lord appeared before me in the form of Sri Krishna.' He then goes on to say how the Lord did in fact appear to him in the form of his 'untouchable' fencing master, 'in the form of the sick in Malaya', 'as a religious mendicant who gave me the first lesson in Vedanta' (this was the stage at which he left Malaya for the Himalayas), 'in the form of this Light so that suffering and pain appeared an illusion', in the form of a half-demented assailant at the ashram in 1950. He might, as so many others have done, have said: '. . . the Lord appeared before me . . .' Instead he took what to us of the West appears the more truthful course of describing the actual appearances. Does this mean that it was any less 'the Lord' who appeared to him? Not at all; nor would he have considered it at all untruthful 'to dismiss the question' with the simple statement that Sri Krishna came to him. His enlightenment consisted in the realization of this identity.

Rishikesh is to many people of the West synonymous with this which is, as we know, only one of many ashrams in this spot to which sadhus in general tend to gravitate. The literature of the Divine Life Society is normally in English, but there are translations of some works in French, Spanish, German, Danish, Indonesian, Tamil. 200 books are attributed to Sivananda himself, 300 in another place by his own computation. Sadhus are also sent on tours, particularly to the United States, to found branches of the society—one has recently been established in New York—and, at least so one surmises, to collect funds.

An explanatory leaflet describes the aim of the society as 'a world-wide revival of spirituality through the dissemination of the great spiritual culture of India in all its aspects—a quick moral and spiritual regeneration in India and all over the world'. The means for attaining this are: publications, conferences, yoga training centres, schools, charitable assistance, dispensaries, by 'broadcasting the essentials of Divine Life, free from all bias and dogma, practicable to every man, woman and child in accordance with the tenets of each one's religion. Thus the society's fundamental aims are purely spiritual, non-sectarian, universally applicable and fully tolerant.' Membership is open to all who 'pledge themselves to practise *Ahimsa*, *Satya* and *Brahmacharya* (to the best of their ability)'.[1] There is a small subscription; a correspondence course is available; and the member is required to send in a periodical report on his progress.

Sivananda calls his system, though system is perhaps not an accurate description of his essentially empirical approach, the *Yoga of Synthesis*, by which he seems to mean that it embraces all that might help men to union with the Divine, every system of yoga, that is, and all religions. This, as we have seen, is within the Hindu tradition; the principal cause of its 'indefinability'. In the matter of religion each takes what suits him best, and Jesus is included among the divine names the devotee is encouraged to pronounce as part of his private worship. The very fact, however, of this litany suggests that really one has to practise *all* religions and worship *all* gods, with special emphasis on the bits one likes best. Christianity comes in for a reasonable share; Easter, for instance, is a feast of the ashram. Something of this is illustrated by the first article in the December 1959 (the current) number of the periodical of the society, *Divine Life*. This, entitled 'A Message of Jesus', is a passage from the Penguin edition of *The Imitation of Christ*. The second article is 'The Spirit of Christmas' by Swami Sivananda himself, beginning with a quotation from the gospels and ending with: 'May the blessings of the Christ be upon all humanity.' The next

[1] *Ahimsa*: non-violence; *satya*: truthfulness; *brahmacharya*: celibacy, which last, with the qualification in the text, is apparently meant to include self-control, i.e., sexual regularity within the married state, though the necessity of complete continence is regularly stressed as essential to the yogi.

article is 'Some Thoughts on Buddhism' by Arnold Toynbee. It is of no consequence to the founder of a Yoga of Synthesis and convener of a World Parliament of Religions that these religions consider themselves to be mutually exclusive, that, for instance, 'Shankara's Hinduism has', in Toynbee's article, 'taken Buddhist philosophy and given it a twist that has turned it into an anti-Buddhist intellectual weapon', and that no Christian Church accepts either Hinduism or Buddhism.

Still it is of the essence of his system, as of Hinduism in general, that there is really no contradiction in such apparent opposites; they are merely so many different angles of approach, ways of looking at things: and he, Sivananda, has seen the point at which they all meet and merge. He is not, unfortunately, able to explain to us how this happens; but is it not, after all, beyond mere reason? We must take it on faith, faith in Sivananda; and it is presumably in this spirit that a female sadhu (Sri Sivananda Hridayananda), who appears to be his constant attendant, describes her conversion in a work entitled: *Sivananda my God*. He therefore transcends all religions, has a universal mission to teach others the way to that towards which the religions of the world are struggling each by its diverse and wandering route.

It is at this point that I am again a little agitated at the thought of 'Satan and all wicked spirits wandering through the world for the ruin of souls'. Do not, please, mistake me, gentle reader. No one could look less than one's conception of a wicked spirit than Swami Sivananda; only of course it would be in Satan's own interests to look as little like himself as possible. The Swami's role is precisely that of one who is 'anti' Christ and all Christ's claims, 'worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God'. However, we all do that to some extent; only Sivananda happens to have a little more influence than some of us. I think he does 'mean well', as my two sadhus in the hills thought. To what extent he is responsible for being in error, as of course I believe he is, is beyond either your knowledge or mine or, even perhaps except in the vaguest way, that of the individual himself. I do however know Christians who, through developing the mentality exemplified here, have lost all real understanding of and sympathy with their own religion, though they still prac-

tise it; and it is of the essence of this mentality that it is not open to reason. Radically it is the Hindu tradition of implicit faith in one's guru, and I am still a little worried about who exactly the guru is.

Having said so much perhaps I ought to give some indication of the characteristics of the teaching offered in the literature that emanates from Sivanandanagar. It is a curious mixture. Christian terms and quotations from the Bible are often used, but in senses quite other than these have in the Christian Church. For example in the same number of the periodical already mentioned, an article on the 'Personality and Message of Sivananda', by Professor Das, M.A., Ph.D., describes him as having been 'graced with the Beatific Vision'. It is reasonably certain that the writer does not mean what the Christian means by Beatific Vision, but the effect on the casual reader is to reduce the ultimate goal of Christianity, attainable only beyond this life, to an incident in the earthly life of this Hindu. But it is typical of this style of writing that we cannot really know what the writer does intend; nor of course does it matter much, if it sounds well—not in this context. Similarly the word 'grace' is used although there is really no room in the yoga system for what the Christian means by grace. I think the Hindu sacred books *can* be interpreted in terms of the Christian doctrine of grace, but that is a different matter.

The little book entitled *Light, Power and Wisdom,* described as a 'Pocket Guru', has a short section on 'Divine Life for Children'. It has some excellent advice such as that on speech: 'Speak softly, sweetly, little, the truth, with love . . .', together with some that makes one wonder if one has read aright: 'Study the Koran, Bible, Gita, Upanishads, Zend-Avesta daily. Put into practice what you have learnt.' Considering the hundreds of conflicting Protestant sects that all claim to base their teaching on the Bible alone, one wonders what philosophy of life the average child would take from it and what would happen if he then tried to add to it the Koran, say, and the Upanishads. But then the conflict in his mind would be only apparent, illusion, just as the wars of religion, religious persecution, and the rest of the *odium theologicum.* What if the Swami's synthesis is also illusion?

The régime enjoined on one who aims at yoga, takes his

religion seriously, is no easy one; and at this point the Christian should take off his hat and acknowledge that anyone who seriously and perseveringly tries to find God will certainly find him, even though he should start off on the wrong foot. This régime includes rising at 4 a.m. and spending a period—two hours is recommended, with a further period of one hour in the evening—in meditation; fasting on certain days; permanent abstinence from meat, alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, 'talkies'.

In the midst of so much that is sound and reasonable it is startling to a westerner to find that recitation of a mantra, a particular form of words, is expected to have an infallible automatic result.[1] One mantra, for instance, given in this invaluable book, 'wards off death, fire-accidents, cycle-accidents, motor-accidents, air-accidents and accidents of all descriptions . . . diseases pronounced incurable by doctors are cured by this mantra. . . . It is a mantra to conquer death—bestows long life, peace, wealth, property, satisfaction and Immortality.' Surely one could hardly ask for more. It might perhaps be indiscreet to ask whether the Swami's hospital is not redundant in the presence of this mantra. It is recommended that on one's birthday this mantra be repeated one *lakh* times (100,000) 'or at least 50,000', moreover it must be 'chanted with sincerity, faith and devotion'. He himself, incidentally, had been unwell for some time when I visited Rishikesh and it is likely that sooner or later he will die.

In a larger work, *Revelation*, by the same author,[2] occurs another instance, taken at random, of a mantra still more surprising to the western mind, yet again reasonable enough on the Hindu hypothesis. It is a 'Scorpion-Sting Cure' and occurs, rather oddly, as the second in a series of spiritual admonitions: 'Be Cheerful; Deepavali; Recipe for Peace of Mind; Ascend the Ladder of Yoga', etc.[3] It is described as 'a mantra to cure scorpion-bites'. A piece of cloth is tied at the place of the sting. The mantra is repeated while one must feel 'all the time the

[1] Mentioned already, the mantra will be discussed more fully a little later (p. 251).

[2] P. 402.

[3] I suppose, on second thoughts, that for most people scorpion-bites might after all be incompatible with 'cheerfulness', 'peace of mind', and the like. Perhaps that is the connection.

poison is coming down'. The cloth is then taken away in a gesture indicating that the poison is being thrown away. The whole process is repeated until the poison goes. It seems that a kind of residue of resistance can be built up by repeating the mantra at other times, especially during the eclipses of the sun, and this is done most effectively while standing waist-deep in water.

At its deepest it is obvious that this is based on the idea that matter is, or ought to be, subject to mind or spirit. Taken a step further by the Hindu conception of the world of phenomena as illusion, a way of looking at things, as for all practical purposes therefore caused by the mind; then looking at things in a different way should produce a different world. If I can fill my mind, by constant repetition, with the idea that I shall avoid accidents by cycle, air, water, attain health, immortality and the rest, then so will it be. 'What I say three times—or a lakh of times—is true.' This concept of mantra seems to be expounded explicitly on page 161 of the same work: 'When an idea exclusively occupies the mind it is transformed into an actual physical or mental state.' This idea is in fact basic to yoga in general. Traditional Hinduism explains the matter in a way which, as I think will be evident, is fundamentally the same while it tries also to expound the mechanics of it, how it works.

Like 'mother's cooking' it is all a matter of 'waves' or 'vibrations', and here too the 'vibrations' seem to be conceived as something material or physical. Sometimes these vibrations are spoken of as light, but more likely light is simply one effect of them. If we try to form a coherent picture out of the scattered and sometimes contradictory accounts, it seems that man himself is composed of vibrations or, if we press the matter, vibrations of light or vibrations that are seen as light. Man in fact (such seems to be the theory) consists of different layers, sheaths or wave-lengths of vibrations, from the longest and slowest that form his body and his physical world up to the highest part of the spirit in which he is one with God in the most subtle vibrations of all. The mantras are forms of words that, when recited, produce vibrations that are the vibrations of lower phenomena at their source, so to speak, their cause, affecting these at the point where they emerge into being. By repeating a mantra many times a man attunes the vibrations of which he

consists to the vibrations of the 'forces' that cause, or appear as, certain classes of physical phenomena; so he becomes one with them instead of being subject to them.

These 'forces' or 'powers' are usually addressed in the mantras as 'gods' or 'persons', but it is doubtful if to the Hindu mind there is any difference between a 'god' and a 'power' or 'force'; any personification of the supreme, Universal Being suggests a limitation, and it matters little whether you call a river, for instance, a river or a 'mother goddess'; it remains equally a manifestation or 'incarnation' of the One.

The one completely comprehensive and universal mantra is OM (sometimes transcribed as AUM). This is the name of God for the Hindu, but in this sense that it actually *is* God manifested in a Word, a sound, a vibration that includes all other sounds or vibrations and so contains in itself the essence and being of all things. (Hindus, especially modern writers, tend to ascribe to it all that is said in the Christian Bible of the *Logos*, the Word. It is a moot point how much their theory owes to the Christian theology of the *Logos*.) A full discussion of this matter would be beyond the scope of these pages, but in outline the idea seems to be as follows.

The sound OM is considered to include the sounds of all the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (47) and so to contain the sounds, the names, the vibrations and so the actual being of all created things.[1] The sounds of the various mantras are, therefore, limited, particularized expressions of the one universal mantra, the OM, controlling, as you might say, certain fields or departments of creation.[2] By repeating OM constantly one becomes

[1] Cf. God's description of himself in *Apocalypse* (*Revelation*) i. 8, as 'Alpha and Omega'. Christian tradition too has attributed a special power to the actual words of sacred scripture, and in the official liturgy of the Church they are treated with great reverence as a certain visible manifestation and revelation of God. The form for the 'Blessing of a Sick Child' in the *Roman Ritual* includes the recitation of the first fifteen verses of the Gospel according to St. John.

[2] In the Christian tradition as seen in St. Thomas (*Summa*) God operates in the created cosmos through the agency of spirits ('angels'), so that each department has its presiding and tutelary spirit in a regular hierarchy. Each human being has his own particular angel. It is considered probable that the 'theophanies' of God in the Old Testament were effected through angels. For the unique dignity of the Annunciation a higher degree of spirit, an archangel, was chosen. In the words of the medieval hymn: *Mittit ad*

attuned to, and finally completely absorbed in, the source of all vibrations. The repetition of OM is thus one of the most common of all forms of prayer for the Hindu, morning prayer, for instance; it is placed at the beginning and end of letters and books; children preface their exercises at school with it; it may be a form of greeting. By repeating mantras made up of the elements of OM, that is of certain letters of the (Sanskrit) alphabet in a special shape and pattern, certain formulas (there are also 'diagram' mantras), one hopes to rise from subjection to the elements to control of them, to the extent at least that one is not harmed by them.[1] All Hindus believe in these mantras. Who decided their form and how? They are traditional, probably handed down from the time of the earliest rishis, the seers and teachers who, in undistracted solitude in the fastnesses of the Himalayas, listened to OM resounding in their inmost being and were able to differentiate or further externalize it into the form of the Hindu sacred literature. One of the most popular of the mantras is in fact found in the *Rig Veda*. The yogi believes that in deep meditation he hears this sound OM resounding within him.[2]

The mantras are sometimes described as 'magical incantations'. They are not really so in the Hindu view; it is a matter of harnessing purely natural powers, and the cause, in their view, is quite adequate to its effect. When using the terms 'natural' and 'material' one must remember again that there is not really room in the Hindu system for a distinction between natural and supernatural, and material and spiritual, though they themselves do use the terms. It is matter of difference of degree rather than of kind, and man, for example, progresses from the gross to the more subtle.

virginem non quemvis angelum, Sed Fortitudinem (i.e., Gabriel) *suum archangelum, Amator hominum.*

[1] Some of the metals, especially gold, silver and copper (but these must be of a special prescribed weight), worn next to the skin are considered to have a beneficial effect. The two swamis with whom I lunched in the hills were wearing copper bracelets. I believe that this is based on the same theory of vibrations, but I have not gone into the matter.

[2] It is in fact stated explicitly, e.g., in the Sivanandanagar literature, that repetition of a word such as OM will produce bodily modifications which, it is implied, carried to their logical conclusion will transform the devotee into OM.

It must be obvious to any thoughtful person that the idea beneath this theory, as distinct from the details of its working-out, is not just sheer nonsense, magic, or superstition. There are certain parallels to it in modern theories of atomic science, and early Christian literature was similarly exercised with the power of words, numbers and symbols. Perhaps in some respects the Christian is at a disadvantage in considering a theory of this kind, for from his own secure position he is able to see it as foreshadowing certain aspects of his own revelation and so is liable to attribute to it a greater degree of consistency than it in fact possesses. The Hindu, for his part, is constitutionally inclined to take any truth from any source and say that it foreshadows very dubious and dark corners of his own belief and present his own as the final consummation of it all. I have no doubt, for instance, that for the ordinary man in the Indian street many of these mantras are simply magical incantations, pure and simple. However, comparing the *idea* beneath this with basic Christian ideas it is possible for the Christian to see what they are aiming at.

The Gospels (it is brought out deliberately in St. John's Gospel) represent the healing words used by the Word as producing a bodily effect which is a symbol of a higher spiritual effect in the soul, e.g., restoration of bodily faculties simultaneously with restoration of 'faculties' of the soul. The *idea* of this is, of course, basic to Christian theology. The repetition of OM is in this respect parallel to the continual repetition of the name of Jesus in the Eastern 'Jesus Prayer' which is expected to produce an analogous result. 'Living with the Church' in the liturgical services of the Church throughout the year is a deliberate 'attuning' of oneself to the 'vibrations' of God really present in the mass and sacraments and 'extended' further into the words and actions of the services of the liturgical cycles. Here, however, we see the Christian being 'attuned' simultaneously at every level of his being. The danger inherent in the Hindu idea of obtaining a thing or a state by only *willing* it is obvious.

Do such mantras work?—the ultimate test for the Englishman. It is obviously impossible to answer such a question without a regular scientific investigation. That they do not work very often is quite certain, or one would have heard more about

it. I personally met only cases where they did not work; sick people on whom 'medicine men' had tried their arts in vain with mantras and material 'charms' and had then turned to me for more conventional medicine. To demonstrate that a mantra had worked in a particular case would obviously not be easy, and even if it were admitted this would not necessarily prove the theory of 'vibrations'. When I am ill I either recover or I do not. If I have called in a doctor and recover, it is at least kind to attribute my recovery in some measure to the doctor's skill. But I might have recovered without the doctor, and I can recall a case when the doctor's treatment actually aggravated the trouble. At least, suspecting this, I stopped the treatment and immediately the trouble began to subside and quickly disappeared. If the doctor had ordered me to recite a mantra I might have recovered; but I should probably have recovered if I had neglected to recite it. It is reasonably certain that had I believed firmly in the power of the mantra it would have had *some* effect; but perhaps if I had recited instead some such slogan as 'Guinness is Good for You' it might have had the same effect—who knows? The power of 'suggestion' and of mind over matter is an undoubted fact. Whether the mind of a man can affect at a distance material things apart from his own body is not so evident, but certain *poltergeist* and similar phenomena suggest that this may not be impossible. Rather oddly it is the mantras for evil purposes that seem to work best. I shall mention them later.[1] There is no doubt in my own mind that these do sometimes work though I do not pretend to know how. It would probably be as difficult to find one who had produced effects by these mantras as it was to find a true yogi or one with the siddhis. They would probably remain something a man hoped he might do, almost felt he could already do, and perhaps in the end convinced himself he actually had done.

This tendency to equate what one would wish to do with what one can do or, a step further, what one has in fact already done, must be taken into account in any assessment of claims to extraordinary powers (whether regarded as natural, preternatural or supernatural; and this for the Hindu is, as we have seen, a matter of degree). The small book *Light, Power and Wisdom* has a remarkable document entitled *Sivananda Gita*, a

[1] P. 290.

kind of extended *Magnificat* of himself by Sivananda. It is dated 1st July, 1946, but this is presumably just a misprint since in it he says he was born in 1887 and is now 73 years old.

Taking a few typical phrases in order of appearance: 'I am ever happy and joyful. I am full of educative humour. I take immense delight in service. . . . I am full of vigour, vim and vitality. I am ever cheerful. I sing, dance, run, jump in joy. I am robust and strong. I can digest any kind of food. . . . At the present moment I am the richest man in the whole world. . . . I am King of Kings. . . . I have a sinewy frame. I have symmetrical limbs. I am a first class gymnast. . . . I love nature etc. . . . I am forgiving. . . . I do not waste even a single minute. I do mental prostration to asses, dogs, trees, bricks, stones and all creatures. . . . To love God with all my heart and soul, to protect cows, animals, women and children are my aims.' [1]

Finally, one passage of this paean is inscribed on a tablet and set in the wall near the entrance of the ashram. I reproduce it because of its oddity; one might not unreasonably expect a few profound, oracular truths of universal application, but instead one finds:

My Method

I do several things
At a time
I study sacred books
I give very prompt reply
To my letters
I continuously work and write and read
Writing bestows joy
I write with
Electric speed.

Excellent for, say, a government official, and useful for anyone, but hardly in itself a sufficient guide to the higher spirituality. However, the only point I wish to make here is that much of this outburst is demonstrably not true, but simply something he would like to be true, and it implies the belief that if he says it with sufficient conviction it will become true. To

[1] Op. cit., pp. 113 ff.

take the point of his abounding health and vitality (he was, of course, 73 when I saw him), on the occasion of my visit it was only too obvious that he was a very sick and tired man, lying at full length on a couch for his audiences and walking to and from the hall only very slowly and with difficulty, supported by two sadhus, leaning on them heavily and pausing at intervals as he went. But in the Hindu formula there is no contradiction here. Sivananda is and has all these qualities: he is God. What I saw was just illusion. When Sivananda makes such claims he is not just shutting his eyes to his sickness, he is also excluding it and escaping its powers—like the ostrich, the westerner might say, but not on this hypothesis.

But it was becoming more and more plain to me that, in spite of their proud speeches and stupendous claims, these men were like one beating blindly at a closed door which refused to open; not on their terms.

Perhaps that was an unduly long meditation at the gates of the ashram. A descriptive leaflet I was given at my darshan with the Swami is entitled *The Call of Sivanandanagar*. 'Sivanandashram, the sacred place, at the foot of the mighty Himalayas, on the banks of the Holy Ganges, with the inspiring presence of the visible God, the spiritual preceptor of the world Sri Swami Sivananda, invites you all to enjoy the bliss eternal—just drop a card about your arrival.' (In a world where men are commonly taken at their own valuation, why should one not, after all, sound one's own trumpet?)

I think I have already said that all are in fact welcomed here, of both sexes, and no charge seems to be made. I myself was invited to stay, this personally by Sivananda. One is promised on this leaflet 'a simple, small but comfortable room on the banks of the Ganges or up in the hill wherefrom you can enjoy the wide view of the Ganges and the Himalayas'. Small, yes, but comfortable? Not, certainly, by western standards; but then I think I never did find a comfortable room in any Indian house. Still this is not important for one seeking the higher life. A sketch of the daily programme is given with the various possibilities and conveniences of the ashram, which includes Post and Telegraph Office and telephone. The aspirant or visitor is awakened at 5 a.m. by the temple bell. 'Have a nice wash in your room itself, go to the temple and attend *puja*'

(i.e., worship). This service is followed by a prayer class (recitation of the *Gita*, *Upanishads*, etc.). 'Finishing the prayer class, kindly come to your room and there you find a young boy with a calm smile, wishing you "Om, Om" giving you Hot, Hot Tea.' (Tea in India is more frequently cold or lukewarm, so perhaps this is no more than a pious hope or meant to produce a feeling of warmth—but let it pass.)

There follows a class in '*yogic asanas*' (physical exercises), 'concentration', meditation, etc., and from 9.30 to 12 noon 'Swamiji's darshan', when he is in the 'office' to give audience or darshan to all who come. One may also just 'do japa or meditation in his presence' or ask his advice. A private audience can also be arranged. Lunch is between eleven and twelve. 'You can go to the Guest Department and have your simple, sattvic and nutritious food there.' (The monthly expenditure on food is said to be twelve thousand rupees, i.e., close on a thousand pounds.) The ashram is said to feed 'nearly 150 residents—and an average of 100 visitors daily besides many local sadhus and poor people'. Evening *puja* is at 6 p.m., dinner at 7. There is a period of meditation at 7.30 followed by a discourse given by the Swamiji at 8 p.m. The afternoon may be spent in lectures: 'yoga vedanta' class, music, art, the various yoga systems, personal talks with teachers, or even in hospital treatment.

On my first visit to the ashram I arrived in the middle of the Swamiji's darshan. He was lying on a couch, propped up with pillows, dressed in white shirt and dhoti with a thick bright-red dressing gown over all (it was a chilly morning in this spot). I had learned in Dehra Dun that he was said to be ill and it was obvious now that he was weak and ailing. His couch for the audience was placed at one end of a long room which was obviously the public office, in which clerks and secretaries squatted on the ground before their desks, the low Indian desk about eighteen inches high, and got on with their work as best they could. It was a typically Indian drab, untidy and rather grubby room. It was filled to overflowing and there was a constant coming and going and general milling about, in the course of which I insinuated myself into the presence and at last found myself, rather to my embarrassment, right opposite the Swami's bed. The little group on the ground immediately



18. 'The Veneration of Images.' Puja (worship) performed by a priest with boy attendent at a shrine beneath a sacred tree. (Any particularly venerable and striking tree is liable to be sacred.) If this is a genuine priest, then he belongs to the brahmin caste.

The Swami noticed me immediately, seeing that I was a European and possibly recognizing me as a priest, as other Indians had done with that curious facility of theirs, though I was not looking at all ecclesiastical. He asked where I came from, and when I explained what I was and the purpose of my travels welcomed me warmly and said how glad he was to see me. He gave me literature, invited me to stay to lunch, gave me a rose and instructed an attendant swami to take me to lunch at the proper time. 'We have simple food here [with a smile], very simple food.' I assured him that I too normally had very simple food and preferred it. When the proper time had come and gone he insisted that I must not miss it, and I was led away. He spoke to me three times during this darshan and my American lady neighbour was obviously deeply impressed by all this attention and possibly a little envious. I felt sorry for her and wondered how long she would stay. She was carrying on bravely but when I looked for her another day I did not see her about. It is possible that she was receiving instruction in some special branch of the spiritual science.

My object on this first visit was simply to absorb, grow into my milieu and receive general impressions. In this way I find that what one is looking for has a habit of coming to meet one. I might later be able to go more deeply into any particular aspect of the life that seemed likely to be rewarding. I had still, of course, especially in mind my quest for a true yogi and one who had the siddhis. At this moment my intention was to observe and see what kind of man this Swami was from the indications given by his interviews. I found that not much happened. It was all very informal. People chattered among themselves or addressed him; he might speak to someone or read. Cups of coffee were passed round at one stage. In the meantime the routine work of the office went on. But the devotees were throughout, in the words of one writer, 'receiving the soothing vibrations that he radiated'. There was a little pilgrimage of schoolboys. They came in at the back entrance which I had, all unknowingly, short-circuited, and stood for some time 'receiving darshan', in other words taking it all in. Nothing particular happened; but to look upon the face of God (for so presumably they regarded him) is no small matter. Then they filed through and out at the door by which I had come in. Each one

as he passed made some kind of reverence, generally prostrating, sometimes kissing the Swami's feet. As the little procession began to move the Swami struck up a chant, each short line followed by the ejaculation 'Govinda'[1] being repeated by the whole assembly. There seems to be a basic form of this chant, not remarkable for great poetry or originality, into which extempore verses may be inserted at will. The basic form is composed of such lines as: God is One, Govinda; God is everything, Govinda; Be good, Govinda; Be pure, Govinda; This world is unreal, Govinda; Time is precious, Govinda. On this occasion he interpolated such phrases as: Don't smoke, Govinda; Don't take, Govinda, Strong coffee, Govinda.

In darshan to a pilgrimage of girls he may use a different chant: Chastity is, Jaya Jaya Ram, Diamond necklace, Sita Ram. Selfless service . . . Is the silk sari, etc. To what extent the girls believed all this I was not in a position to discover. The advice given on every occasion was eminently practical and sound, even if not calculated to effect a fundamental lasting conversion of soul. It was, however, as I have suggested, the contact with holiness, with its invisible vibrations, that was expected to be the real agent, and this was evidently the thought of the pilgrims.

Apart from these general audiences people may approach the Swami for advice on personal problems, and there is not usually any embarrassment in doing this in public in the presence of the usual motley assembly. So on my second visit a young man in his teens was seated on the ground before the Swami unfolding to him the history of his soul. The Swami listened to him with the patient detachment that he might have given in earlier days to the recitation of his symptoms by a bodily sufferer in Malaya, putting a question now and then, or nodding in understanding. The young man was apparently a student who used his vacations to make an intensive study and practice of yoga: he spoke with great earnestness. The swami interrupted him at one point in his description of his spiritual experiences: 'And did you actually feel yourself flying through

[1] I asked one of the Indian pilgrims what 'Govinda' meant. He said: 'It is the name of God.' It appears to be a name given to Krishna, one of the Hindu 'incarnations', in commemoration of one of his legendary exploits.

the air?' 'No, I did not. . . .' The Swami nodded in silent approval. I felt he would have been as surprised as I if the young man had said 'yes'. I believe that within the limitations of his own system, aided by the practical psychology a good doctor must acquire in the course of a long and varied practice, he was better fitted than most to advise and guide such young people.

I had my lunch in the 'Guest Department'. The young German girl came in about the same time and I was able to have a few words with her; I had, of course, recognized her as a European in spite of her Indian dress. As a concession to what it was assumed would be my European practice I was given a small table and chair. It was the usual lunch of rice, chapatties, vegetables and curd, *sattvic*, i.e., without the curry, spices and onion which, together with tea, coffee and tobacco, are frowned on by the yogi, but do give a little kick to what is otherwise a very insipid diet. These items, served separately as is the custom, were in little bowls made of leaves fastened together by thorns or twigs passed through them. This is common enough and even in trains a section of banana leaf is sometimes the 'plate' provided by the smaller caterers. In Kerala I once walked along the road for a mile or so with a small dark-skinned boy wearing only a small loincloth and speaking excellent English. He was carrying on his head a load of these banana leaves for sale in the market. He would receive only a few pence for them and from where I met him he had at least five miles to walk.

In this case my meal was placed on a small tray for me together with the usual large glass of water. It was not very appetizing; it was also cold, but that was my fault since I had arrived late. I would have much preferred the coffee and sandwiches I had secreted away in my small ex-army satchel, but *toujours la politesse* and I ate most of the fare provided. The room, opening on to a covered verandah, faced the river, smooth-flowing and flooded in sunlight, mirroring the buildings on the opposite bank with their terraces and long flights of steps leading down to the water, on which bathers in the sacred stream came and went. Monkeys chattered and scampered, skidding on the corrugated iron of the roof and sliding down the posts of the verandah. Devotees, pilgrims, holiday-

makers and sightseers, many of them with cameras, in every variety of eastern and western dress, passed in a constant stream as I sat at my meal.

I had already finished by the time the Swami came down from the office on a higher terrace, having long overstayed his advertised time. He was now descending to what was described as his 'tent' but was, I think, just another building, and I was able to observe the progress of the holy man. Supported by two sadhus and followed by a little band of devotees he walked slowly along the winding path, stopping at frequent intervals for those who pressed round for a word with him. At one corner a man sat on the ground charming a couple of very weary-looking snakes in a small woven-grass basket in front of him. The Swami gave him a small alms. On another day on his way up to the office he was accosted by a number of photographers, probably from the press judging by their equipment, and obligingly posed for them at several places.

As I have said, my main object on my first visit was to gather general impressions, and I felt that I already had as much as I could digest at one time. In fact I felt that even if I left it at that I should have fulfilled the purpose of my visit: it was reasonably certain that I should not find a yogi in the sense in which my Poona friend had used the word: it was not that kind of place. Sincere and good people I should probably find and men who meant well, but not one who had bridged the unbridgeable gulf—unbridgeable, that is, by any expansion or realization of one's own powers—between the natural and the supernatural, making men 'fellow-citizens with the saints and the domestics of God'. Nor did I any longer expect to find even men who habitually possessed the siddhis. But I still wished to test this as far as possible. Accordingly I set out to make an appointment with someone with whom I could discuss these matters.

The Polish 'nun' or 'lady swami' already referred to seemed the most friendly and approachable, so I asked her. It was only afterwards that I reflected that as a Pole she probably was, or had been, a Catholic and that this formed a certain bond of sympathy, so that when we next met her face lit up, and instead of the pious eastern 'OM', I was greeted with the western and not so pious 'Ah!' She was able to point out to me the

swami who could most easily arrange an appointment for me and I approached the one indicated. He was friendly and willing to help. He offered to introduce me to a swami, one of the regular members of the ashram, who was, he considered, one of the most advanced in yoga and the best qualified to explain it to me. (He was in fact one of the two swamis in the ashram whose regular duty it was to give personal instruction and advice in spiritual problems to those who came to the ashram for this purpose: Sri Swami Krishnanandaji.) This swami lived in the buildings of the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy on the other side of the road on the side of the hill, so that to reach it we had to wind our way through the lower ashram, cross the road and climb the long flights of steep steps up the face of the hill; this was much more quiet and unfrequented. An appointment was made for the following day and we returned to the road.

On the way up the hill I was able to sound the first swami on this matter of the siddhis: were these marvellous powers commonly acquired by advanced yogis? Did he know anyone who had them? Was there, for instance, anyone in this ashram, or in any of the other ashrams in the district, who had? His answer was quite unhesitating, clear and unequivocal: 'No, we in the ashram know of no one who has these siddhis.' In the course of the conversation he did say that he believed they were to be taken in their literal sense, and his reason was revealing: 'They must be possible because we have conceived them.' The thought of them (to dream of them the westerner would probably say) is a higher reality than to accomplish them and the latter depends upon the former. He held in common with all with whom I had discussed the question, that they could be a hindrance to true spirituality and so were not to be sought after. This was reasonable enough; some might even think it too good a reason why *no one* should have them; I took my leave and departed, looking forward to my discussion with the other swami when I should return to the ashram.

I had noticed in passing the 'Sivananda Ayurvedic Pharmacy' and, since I am interested in drugs and hoped later to make a study of Ayurvedic and Tibetan medicine and the philosophy on which this is based, it seemed that a visit might be interesting. There is a big variety of medicines available; a few of them are mentioned in the little descriptive leaflet of the

ashram. They include 'Brahmin Amala Medicated Oil, The Best Brain Cooler'. I did not invest in any of this, but I have a little patch of some kind of eczema on the inside of the elbow of one arm. This developed a few weeks after I left the army at the end of 1945 and I have had it ever since. The local doctor assured me that it was not infectious or contagious and would not spread but seemed unable to do anything about it, and it has just remained there. I have an idea that it is largely psychological since it increases or subsides according as I am more or less harassed, at times almost completely disappearing but inevitably returning to its usual form. I have not troubled much about it, but I have occasionally tried one or other of the latest ointments; all without any effect. Among the medicines advertised here was a 'Cureczema' at two rupees a one-ounce jar. I decided to try it. If it cured my eczema it would indeed be a high recommendation for Ayurvedic medicine; if it did not it would prove nothing except that Ayurveda is not infallible, and I never supposed that it was. In fact it had no effect.

There were at least three assistants visible in the pharmacy although this, the winter season, was a slack time, so I concluded that they did a good business. Their booklet shows that they have agencies throughout India and that their products travel to European and American countries. I noticed 'Himalayan Honey' listed among their medicines (this is regarded in India almost as a medicine rather than a food) and recalling someone who would be very thrilled at a tin of honey from the Himalayas, I asked for it. I was told: 'Out of stock.' I do sometimes take no for an answer and I did on this occasion; I could hardly do otherwise without accusing a saffron-robed swami of a 'terminological inexactitude'; but I struck up a conversation in the course of which it emerged that I had actually had darshan of the Swamiji himself, had received honourable notice from him, eaten his salt, and even been invited to reside in the ashram. A slight gesture was made to one of the assistants. Nothing was said, but he went to a large green steel cupboard of the most modern type, opened it and took from it a half-pound tin of Himalayan Honey ('Nature's Best Health Tonic. Highly Useful for Children. To be taken with milk or water'). This was handed to me without a word. He said nothing; I said nothing. The cost was added to my bill and I departed.

I had still an hour or more to wait until my Hindu friend was due to pick me up in the car, so I sat on the wall at the side of the road near the entrance of the ashram and, having recited none and vespers, remained there to see what could be seen and reflecting on and assimilating what I had already learned. Many people passed, sadhus among them, as I sat, and it was here that I remember being addressed for the first time as 'Swamiji'. A pilgrim passed, a kind of unofficial, 'irregular' or possibly temporary sadhu, and raised his hand in salutation. A pukka swami passed and greeted me with the sacred OM. A few minutes later a swami of the *naga* (naked) type passed, smeared in white ash, naked except for what in India is vulgarly called a 'cod-piece', beads round his neck, his long black hair oiled and screwed up into a bun on the top of his head, his trident carried over his shoulder like a rifle and holding in the other hand the usual brass pot. He was thin and lean but not emaciated (these are usually considered the most ascetic of the swamis) and walked with a quick, vigorous stride though his motion was strangely ungainly and shambling. He did not salute me. A bus had drawn up at the ashram gate and what I assumed to be a young novice or aspirant came out with what were probably his parents. They boarded the bus; it moved off; he waved goodbye and returned into the ashram. Over his saffron robes he wore a bright maroon-coloured woollen pullover: he was probably feeling the cold. A young lady who, in the way some young ladies have, contrived to look smart and well-dressed, came down the steps of the Academy wearing the saffron robes of a swami. Whether she was a pukka swami or just a student who had adopted the dress for local colour, or because she felt it became her, there is no knowing. She had a worn look—possibly the 4 a.m. rising did not agree with her—and a worried and rather irritable expression not typical of yogic, contemplative calm. She walked slowly up the hill followed by a small black-and-white dog.

Down on the flat roofs of the ashram below the level of the road a couple of saffron dhotis had been spread out to dry and as I looked a young European came to collect his own underwear which he had apparently washed out himself and left there to dry. I do not think it was the young American I had seen at the darshan. Washing one's own linen is a prudent proceeding

and one which I always followed myself. The water in which the *dhobis* (laundrymen) wash their linen is of doubtful cleanliness, but there is no doubt whatever of the cleanliness of the clothing that is immersed in it or of the number of diseases that they hold concealed. There is always great competition among the dhobis for the linen of convents, convent schools and Christian charitable institutions since it is known that this is much cleaner than the general run of linen and so requires less work. A rather unpleasant skin disease known as 'Dhobi Itch' is sometimes contracted from linen washed by the dhobis and perhaps this young man had heard of it. And after all, if Cureczema from the 'Sivananda Ayurvedic Pharmacy' does not in fact cure eczema, what is one to do?

DISCUSSION

When I returned for my interview I could not at first find the swami. I made my way to what I thought was his cell but received no reply when I knocked. After knocking again and still finding no response I tried another cell and at last, after a little scouting round, found a swami who told me that he thought the man I was seeking was at home; he was probably 'taking food'. He went along to the door and knocked and called, and ascertained that the swami was at home and was in fact taking food. He asked me to wait for a few minutes. After a minute or so the door opened; a young man who, it appeared, was the bearer, assistant or private secretary of the swami—he seemed to combine these offices—came out with a small folding chair which he set down on the verandah and asked me to be seated; the swami would be out in a few minutes. He spoke in English, but one comes to take that for granted in India even today. After a very few minutes the swami did appear. In the interval I wondered vaguely what meal he had been taking. It was much too early for even an early lunch; it was also much too late for breakfast, particularly if one rises at four, or even five, o'clock. Possibly he had been interviewing clients and his breakfast had been delayed. In any case it was none of my business. He proceeded to wash his hands and rinse out his mouth in the traditional manner, squirting the water from his mouth in a long, thin stream as from a hose-pipe. (Dhobis,

who have acquired this habit from youth, find it very useful when damping down clean linen in preparation for ironing, but instead of a single stream are able to produce a well-regulated spray.) The boy brought another chair and set it for the swami. He at first sat on it in western style, but during the course of the conversation he changed his position, put his feet up and squatted on it in what was obviously for him the more natural position, but since the seat of the chair was small he had to unwind his legs from time to time and make a fresh beginning. (Trains and buses are provided with seats, but frequently people double up their legs—generally removing their shoes first—and squat.)

This swami was polite and courteous but, I felt, a little ill at ease; there was none of the ease of manner of the swami who had introduced me to him, still less of the perfect ease and friendliness of the Polish lady sadhu: he seemed to be on the defensive. Nor did I succeed ever in really drawing him out during the interview and eliciting any spontaneous utterance; he kept strictly to the questions I asked and volunteered nothing of his own accord. He was a youngish, slightly-built man with the sensitive features of a student. He looked slightly unhappy and a little puzzled, with something of the air of a stranger and a pilgrim; a searcher after the truth rather than one who has already attained. I missed the calm detachment of a Gautama Buddha, looking down on a foolish world with that inscrutable expression in which profound wisdom touched with compassion seem about to blend into the suspicion of a smile. He was one of the regular lecturers in the Academy as well as being specially deputed to deal with particular questions and personal problems and was probably a busy man.

He began by dictating to me a list of books which he said I should study closely. The first three were by the Vice-President of India, one of the most outstanding exponents of what is sometimes called 'Neo-Hinduism', published by the Oxford University Press and Allen and Unwin. He recommended twelve works in all, one or two of them in several volumes. I think he would have been glad to let the matter rest here, sending me away to study these works and to draw my own conclusions. Such is, of course, the scholarly approach: an examination of the original sources and a knowledge of the interpretations

of the principal authorities. But I knew enough already to know that for the past two to three thousand years scholars had reached, and were still reaching, opposing conclusions on the most fundamental questions of Hinduism. It was unlikely, to say the least, that I should reach any final conclusion in what time remained to me in the world of illusion, even if I were disposed to devote all my energy to the task: and I was not. My only immediate question was the very practical one of whether it worked; whether it produced true yogis in large numbers, or whether it had produced one; failing that, whether it had produced one who through the siddhis had attained to perfect, complete control of his environment. One could be easily reconciled to not knowing how it worked if only one were sure that it did work.

I mention the matter of the literature that was recommended because it is significant. Hindus are very loth to give a direct answer to a question in philosophy or religion; there is a tendency to say that you will find the answer in a certain book or to recommend a certain course of study.[1] I had already thought long and deeply over fundamental principles. I had my own ideas of how Christian revelation fulfilled what was adumbrated by the Hindu sacred books. I wished to see how this professional guide in the spiritual life adapted Hinduism to the practical needs of the ordinary man, and above all I wanted to see the finished product or to know where I could find it. I therefore asked if I could discuss with him a few points that arose from my reading. I thought it would be politic to lead up gradually to my burning question (which the other swami had, in any case, answered and in answering had suggested that his answer was that of the whole community: but I had not yet given up). He agreed but, as I have said, it was obvious that his heart was not in it and he would have preferred to be left in peace.

His attitude in general was apologetic when he did speak; he seemed to wish to demonstrate the compatibility of Christianity

[1] I do not, of course, quarrel with this as a basic attitude; it is a waste of time to discuss such matters with one who is not prepared to devote a certain minimum of time and trouble to them. A turning towards God is a turning towards the Light: *Dominus Illuminatio mea*. But the Hindu attitude goes beyond this, tending to avoid *any* definition.

with his interpretation, or the ashram's interpretation, of Hinduism. He was sometimes evasive and was obviously not very happy about my own syllogistic mode of argument. His general attitude can be summed up by his reply to my question about some article of Christian belief (I forget what precisely it was): did Hinduism hold this? He replied: 'Hinduism must hold it because Hinduism contains all religions.' This, as we have seen, is the basic attitude of all Hindus. If compelled to define this they would probably say that in Hinduism all other religions are resolved into a higher synthesis, or rather the one final definitive synthesis. Only of course there is no synthesis; 'you can believe any damned thing you like', providing you go through the motions of Hinduism.[1]

I shall reproduce as accurately as I can remember, from notes made at the time or immediately after, the main points of our discussion. There was, of course, more to it than this whenever I had to elaborate a question or examine an answer in order to make sure that we had understood one another.

I was anxious to make sure that I got in my two main questions, the whole object of my journey, to which the rest was subsidiary, so I asked him: 'Do you know a yogi who has attained to full realization?' 'Yes.' (I had, of course, been introduced to him as to one who was at least well on the way to 'realization', but I could hardly say this explicitly: and monosyllabic answers throughout were not encouraging.) 'Would it be possible for me to meet one? For instance are the swamis here such, or most of them?' 'Yes.' The implications of this were so overwhelming when one considers the enormous power and status of a fully realized yogi as envisaged by Patanjali, that I had to make sure that he really meant this; it approached so closely the incredible. These 'Yeses' were a little disconcerting and not altogether satisfactory, so I talked round the subject a little and gradually returned to it, extracting the admission that: 'It is never possible to say one has attained to *perfect*

[1] It is presumably clear to the reader that the—to the Christian irreconcilable—opposition between Hinduism and Christianity is the Christian belief, stated unequivocally by Christ, that the Church is the one ark of salvation for all, operating through sacraments, and a priesthood with an unbroken line of succession, both instituted by Christ and assured of infallible guidance and preservation till the end of time.

realization, only that one is on the way.' This really seemed to cancel out the first statement and I left it there for the moment. Later in the conversation I asked if Swami Sivananda was a *perfectly* realized soul. He answered: 'Yes.' Perhaps I should say that I had no wish to cross-examine the swami or to trap him; I was sincerely looking for information and was only trying to find what he really believed.

I now produced my second main question: 'The siddhis of Patanjali; are they to be taken literally?' 'Quite literally.' (This in an emphatic tone.) 'The power to travel through the air thousands of miles in a moment; to enter into material things, into dead bodies and bring them to life; take the whole universe within oneself; become invisible; universal dominion, and the rest?' 'Yes.' 'Do all the swamis here possess these powers?' 'Yes.' (The reader will remember that the swami who introduced me to this one said unhesitatingly that they in the ashram knew of no one who had these powers.) 'Are these stages through which all pass to realization?' 'Yes.' 'Has anyone ever seen them do any of these things?' 'No. They will never let anyone see them do the siddhis; pure spiritual realization is so much more important.' 'Yes, indeed; but it is just this marvellous, spectacular aspect of yoga that is emphasized in books written for the West and it has the effect of drawing people away from true religion and union with God. I have not yet been able to find anyone who in fact has these powers. Still you say yogis do have them. Swami Sivananda could, for instance, appear and disappear at will, be bodily present or present only in spirit?' 'Yes.' 'Has Swami Sivananda ever been known to use this power?' 'No.' 'Would it not be possible for me to meet someone who will do one of these things?' 'No; they will never do it.' 'I assure you that this is not just sheer curiosity. I too am a monk and have made some study of such matters; it would be of great value to me to know from ocular evidence that such things do happen.' 'No, they will never do it. No one ever sees them do these things; it is not allowed.' 'But they are *able* to do them?' 'Yes.'

It seemed that I was to get no further in this direction. I did ask him if these powers were the development of a latent physical power on the lines of Kundalini Yoga, essentially, that is, a matter of physical control and development, and he said

this was so.[1] A discussion of the matter is beyond the scope of this work, but I would suggest that for a proper understanding of any of these systems it is essential to realize that for the Hindu what we call the spiritual is the only true reality and the physical and material a manifestation of it, with the warning already given of the tendency today to transmute the spiritual into the material and make it all a purely material, mechanical process: it is more than a change of name.

Roughly then, what I had ascertained was this: according to this swami yogis commonly had these powers; all the swamis in this ashram, even though they had not attained to full realization, had them; no one had ever been known to use them. On the other hand the other swami, a less subtle personality, had no doubt at all that they knew of no one with these powers. Is there any way of reconciling these two statements? I had the impression that they were both honest men with no intention to deceive. Can one reasonably believe in the existence of powers that no one has ever been known to use? Could the explanation be that already suggested, the feeling that one almost *could* do such things, consciousness of a latent power, growing to the conviction that one really can? The swami with whom I had my discussion, the more thoughtful, idealistic and imaginative type, was convinced that all his community could do these things if they liked—'all things are possible to him who believeth'—only of course they would not think of doing such things; this would be an obstacle to higher things. I must leave my readers to judge.

I have drawn out these two questions first since they were the primary object of my visit, but I did discuss many other matters. I wished to sound his attitude to Buddhism and mentioned that it was sometimes said by superficial writers that there was no place in Buddhism for God. He replied that: No, there was not. (The same thing is also said, of course, of Hinduism; a system in which to some people everything is God, and so nothing is God in the Christian sense of the word. I believe personally that this is a travesty of Hinduism but undoubtedly it does mean this to many Hindus and not least to the modern 'scientific' type.) I went on to say that such was not my own impression of Buddhist belief, however easy it might be to come to that conclusion from a study of some Buddhist writings divorced from experi-

[1] Cf. p. 120.

ence of Buddhist practice. I mentioned my conversation with the lama recorded in an earlier chapter, that when they spoke of 'absorption' into a 'universal spirit', they did not really mean extinction of conscious personality or mere oblivion, but a continued conscious existence in which the soul was united to God as the source of its being; that in fact they were trying to say much the same as Christians, though they might explain it in a different way. 'Yes, that is so.'[1] The reader will notice that my swami has here made what amount to two contradictory affirmations, only probably in his own mind and within his own scheme of things there will be no contradiction. Each statement is a way of turning the soul toward God and seeking him and at the end of the road a state will be reached in which the soul and God are one. If, according to different Hindu schools, (*a*) there will be complete identification between man and God, and (*b*) a distinction will remain and God will remain transcendent—well, there might seem more than a world of difference to the Christian, but the Hindu can accept both or either.

It was only after some time that I returned to this same question of continued conscious existence after death. It is, after all, of some importance to the ordinary man in the street; he may not be very interested in how it happens, but he would like to be assured that it really does happen. I approached the subject by a slightly different route.

'In *perfect* realization is individual personality lost, continued conscious existence as a separate individual?' 'No, he will not then have any existence separate from God.' 'I am not sure if I understand you correctly on this point. Obviously a man draws his being from God and cannot exist *independently* of him; he cannot exist without God and there is nothing positive in him that has not come from God; but do I understand you to mean that in his final state man will be so one with God that there will be no distinction between them, man will have no separate existence? Will you, for instance, have an existence separate from mine; shall we exist still as two distinct persons? Shall I know you and you know me as separate individuals?'

[1] Some Buddhists do in fact deny the existence of God. So the General Secretary of the Mahabhodi Society of India has said recently (April 26th, 1960): 'It is definite that Buddhism rejects the idea of "God"' (*Basic Education*, Vol. I, no. 3, Bombay, 1960).

Perhaps this was in a way begging the question, since in the Hindu view even our separate existence in this world is only our way of regarding things; we are not really distinct; the distinction, the sense that we are distinct, separate, is maya, illusion. But because it seems certain, from what I had already ascertained, that in the Hindu view this world with its apparently separate people and things is not just *nothing*, *sheer* illusion in this sense, this amounted in fact to the Christian view that this material world and our earthly existence do not exist *independently*, of their own right, all they have is received from and maintained in existence by God; they are only the reflection in this way of a life that has its source in God, and it is God present in them who is giving them their being. But if this world is not just *nothing*, then there must be *something* in the distinction between people and things. I felt that this was really what Hinduism was trying to say, if properly understood, and this is what I was trying to induce my swami to say, but he replied: 'No, we shall not exist separate.' 'How, then; if you maintain that you will still have a conscious existence?' (He hesitated.) 'I shall know you . . .' (He hesitated again and seemed unable to express what he wanted to say.) I: '. . . as part of yourself, *in* yourself?' He: 'Yes, that is what I mean.'

I did not wish to make explicit mention of Christian doctrine in case he was tempted to express an agreement he did not really believe and which might be from my viewpoint incompatible with beliefs he did hold, his attitude being, as we have seen, that all Christian beliefs are contained in Hinduism. From the statements he had made so far it seemed to me that his belief could easily be interpreted in terms of the Mystical Body of Christ and the Communion of Saints; but had I said this he would merely have been confirmed in his idea that Hinduism included Christianity, whereas it seemed to me that Hinduism as he saw it was a formless, indefinable entity that achieved shape and definition only within the framework of Christian revelation. How confused his own ideas were of his own beliefs, or at least how difficult it was for him to give them clear expression in a form that would be intelligible to the ordinary man without much education or power of philosophic reasoning, will be apparent from the next stage in our conversation—only of course it is not necessary that your ordinary man should

be able to understand such matters; that will come only after many incarnations.

The foregoing exchange had led logically to the question of bodily survival: 'Will man continue to have a body when he has attained to realization?' 'Yes.' I had not expected this, so I continued: 'But when he is *fully* realized, and is one with God?' 'No, not then.' This question of continued bodily existence, entailing the existence of a world in which it will continue to exist, is so fundamental to all human thought and hope that it is almost impossible for man to imagine any kind of existence without it, and almost as difficult for him to find such an existence at all desirable; so I tried to press this point and to ensure that I really understood the swami properly. The two swamis in Almora, it will be remembered, did hold a continued bodily existence and the continued existence of this world, and I thought that if I could get at this swami's real meaning I might find that he held the same belief. Dr. Panikkar had thought there was no place for this in the Hindu system. The discussion at this point became very involved and I shall reproduce only the decisive, the salient, features.

'Will, then, this visible, material world continue to exist still?' 'Yes, it is eternal.' 'But surely if man, when fully realized, is one with God, and the world is only one aspect of God and they are not separate, then man must possess the world too?' 'There is no *must* about it; God is not *compelled* to do anything.' (One of the siddhis acquired on the way to realization is *ishatvam* or 'dominion', universal power over all things, and running through this, and more particularly underlying the theory of Hindu and Tibetan medicine, is the conception of man as a microcosm, so that 'the forces of this human microcosm can move the forces of the universal macrocosm'.[1] It is implied that this 'universal dominion' over the world is a stage one leaves behind on passing to perfect realization, but one would expect this last to include the possession of or identification with all that is real in the material world, if this is eternal and one with God. However, to have raised this question might have confused the issue and I let it pass. What I was trying to ascertain was whether he did or did not believe that man in his final state

[1] *Yoga for the Modern World*, Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati (Madras, 1955), p. 152.

would have also a bodily existence with, so to speak, a world to fit it. I was less interested in how this might be explained.) I continued: 'No, of course, God is not *compelled* to do anything; still does he in fact arrange it like this, that man when fully realized has a continued bodily existence with eternal possession of this world?' 'God does what he will; no one can say what he will.' 'Well then, is it common belief among Hindus that man will have a continued bodily existence?' 'Whatever God wills.' I think he did not really believe in a continued bodily existence but was unwilling to admit that there was any Christian teaching that was not included in Hinduism.

It will be obvious from this discussion that in spite of the radical assumption that God and man are one and that there is no distinction between them and no separate existence, in fact they are always envisaged as distinct and separate so that it is possible to confront one with the other and say God may or may not let me do and be certain things. I believe that any Hindu could in fact accept Christianity as presented in, for example, the scheme of the Areopagite, with its equal insistence on both the transcendence and immanence of God, if it were not for the psychological inhibition, the impossibility of accepting anything on the philosophical or religious plane that is not 'made in India'. But no one believes that the Areopagite was really a westerner.

We seemed to have reached a stalemate. He had said at first that there was no continued bodily existence after perfect realization; now he seems to suggest that it *might* be possible *in conformity with the will of God*. This, however, is complicated by the fact that man—quite certainly at this stage if not before—is identified with God so that one might as well say that man will have a continued bodily existence *if he wills it*. The whole trend of Hindu thought is, however, actively against his willing it: the visible world and man's body in it are simply the illusion from which he has to escape for ever. Ultimately the question depends upon the relationship between the world of phenomena and God; if this world is illusion it is necessary to decide in what sense it is illusory and what kind or measure of reality it has: there is a very wide choice of theories among the Hindu schools.

The swami, as I have said, was obviously a busy man and seemed to have a considerable correspondence. His bearer or

assistant kept coming to him with sheafs of papers, drafts of letters for approval, cheques for endorsement, and for verbal consultation.

There were a number of minor points on which I wanted clarification, for surely here, if anywhere, I might find the spirituality of the scarcely-trodden heights translated into terms within the grasp of the ordinary man. For instance the aim of the yogi is considered to be withdrawal as completely as possible from the visible, material world. It is commonly believed in the West that yogis to that end reject physical activity as far as possible and in particular manual work. I asked if it was considered good or recommended for sadhus and yogis to engage in manual work. I had heard conflicting opinions on this from different sadhus. 'A yogi,' he replied, 'may do anything that tends to help himself or others to realization. Spiritual exercises such as meditation are higher, but anything that will contribute to realization is good and allowable.' This seemed eminently sane and practical. At times and places in the Christian Church efforts have been made by various bodies to exclude as far as possible all physical activity from life and make it one long course of prayer and meditation. Apart from the fact that this has been found by experience to be impossible in practice, except perhaps in a few cases that must be considered abnormal, it cuts at the root of man's essential constitution: he is so made that his inner spiritual life must be reflected in an outer, physical activity about a visible world. But in the Christian view man's essential constitution, freed from its limitations and imperfections, remains unchanged for ever and will always require a physical world.

I asked him about mantras, wishing to confirm my impression of how they were considered to work: 'These are a special form of words with a spiritual and physical effect. How do they produce this effect?' He replied: 'Words and phrases have a certain form and shape so that when pronounced they set up certain vibrations which affect first the bodily organism and through that the soul.' 'These are what in western philosophy we should call material, physical vibrations?' 'Yes.' He meant, of course, more than sound waves affecting directly the organ of hearing and through that the understanding. He had in mind the traditional notion already mentioned.

I next made to him the suggestion already made to the swami in Banaras, that a Christian found Hinduism very cold and comfortless compared with his own religion; or something worse, as when the deity is given a shape depicting him as a kind of glorified devil-dancer, streaming with blood, contorting his body, a look of fiendish glee on his evil face as he raises his arms in triumph and in a dance of death treads beneath his feet poor, foolish, weak and erring—yes, decidedly erring—human men and women. (Come to think of it, Dante has some pretty lurid descriptions of hell, and the medieval painters produced some striking illustrations which left little to the imagination. Still the swami did not think of mentioning this, and I did not. It is, in any case, a fact that the prayer of the Hindu does tend to be a defence against unseen powers that wish to harm him or a request to be let off lightly.) Hinduism, at least as it was commonly represented and understood, could at most exhort men to a renunciation and refusal of the visible world and hold out to him the hope of a merging in a 'Universal Consciousness', concerning which it was at least doubtful if it would involve any continued, separate, conscious existence, be any more than oblivion. To a Christian God was a person, actually present to him, hearing, sympathizing, comforting and guiding him at every stage of his way, whom he can pray to and enter into communion with, living by his life. Moreover he is at one and the same time the one unseen, transcendent God and also incarnate in material, bodily form, so that man has, through union with God, literally the best of both worlds to possess for ever.

He replied: 'Hinduism has all that other religions have, so it must have this.' I insisted: 'But has prayer for another, for instance, any meaning within your system?' I mentioned the attitude of other sadhus. 'Yes,' he said, 'we can pray to God.' 'But is not one's individual karma something that must be followed and worked out, so that there is no evading it? How, then, can one ask God to take it away or to relieve one's own or another's trouble? Would this not be to deprive him of his chance of being reborn in a higher state?' 'Yes, we can pray to God for assistance.' (One of the books issued from the ashram does in fact ask devotees to allocate a certain proportion of their prayers to Sivananda, that is, if I understand it rightly, *for*

Sivananda, though how he should need prayers if he is fully realized and 'God' is not clear to me. There are, of course, within the Hindu system avatars who are incarnations of God come to this world to assist men towards realization, but by the very fact of being incarnations they are something less than God, beings to pass beyond like all material things. Still it is to such 'incarnations' that the popular devotion of the Hindu is addressed and he is always ready, as we have seen, to erect any good man into another 'incarnation'. There is a modern work entitled *The Imitation of Sri Krishna* which, by its title, suggests that it is inspired by *The Imitation of Christ*.[1] The place of such 'incarnations' in the Hindu system is, as I have suggested elsewhere, analogous rather to that of the saints of Christianity than to that of Christ.)

I have already said twice that the swami was clearly a busy man. He had given me much of his time with great patience. He had begun the discussion with no great enthusiasm and it was plain that he would be glad to bring it to an end; but there were still a few things I wished to ask and I watched to see how far I might prolong the conversation.

I wanted especially to find out what significance the Hindu attached to idols, shrines and sacred pictures, and how he himself explained them. Western visitors are often profoundly shocked by what they consider 'idolatry'; but here I had a certain fellow-feeling with the Hindu, since Catholics have statues in their churches—often too many and too ugly—and also place shrines along the highways: yet they certainly do not indulge in idolatry. However, the Englishman who will keep a picture of his wife and child at his bedside and may even in an unguarded moment (and unseen) go to the lengths of kissing it, will be horrified at the sight of a Catholic child lighting a candle before a statue or a Hindu lighting a stick of incense.

In western manuals of Catholic pastoral theology such statues are commonly interpreted as intended simply to *remind* one of God or the saint represented; to act as a focus for one's attention

[1] It is of no consequence for the Hindu whether 'gods' or avatars had any historical existence or whether the legends concerning them have any foundation in fact. The idea or conception of such 'gods' and legends would be considered as having a higher degree of reality than any historical sequence of events.

and even to excite devotion, since the spiritual faculties are affected by the senses as the swami saw in explaining the working of mantras and, I think a more radical reason, it is of man's nature that he display his internal dispositions by some external action. Consequently I have never been able to believe that even the most primitive tribes really believed their idols to be literally God, though they might believe the divinity was present in them and interpret this in various ways. In the case of the Hindu there was the complication that all things are God, and this in a very literal sense: why, in that case, should a particular statue or idol be more God than anything else? In this, as in so much else if one may judge by his answers, the swami's knowledge was rather sketchy. Repeatedly I had been able to see how Hindu belief and practice reflected and adumbrated, often admittedly in a confused and distorted manner, what was contained as part of a regular, coherent system in Christianity. I often felt, that is, that I could have made out a much stronger case for Hinduism than the Hindus themselves, much as St. Thomas sets out with such an impressive logic the points of an argument he is just about to demolish.

I referred to the statues and symbols in Hindu temples, and more particularly to the innumerable small shrines to be seen along the roadsides of India, containing often no more than one or more rough pieces of stone picked up from the earth, daubed with red ochre, and set in a shrine to be decorated with garlands and have incense burned before them. I had been told by a bishop who had spent a lifetime in India that these small stones were always phallic symbols, chosen for their (often very vague) resemblance. I am nearly certain that this is at least not always so, and think any piece of stone may be taken, without any phallic significance. I asked in what sense idols, and in particular such odd pieces of stone, were considered to be God, and what kind of worship, if any, was paid to them; what, at least, was the significance of the marks of respect given to them. He did not appear to have any clear ideas on the matter and, as I have said, he was throughout disinclined to elaborate any such brief statements as he did make. In this case his remarks were, on the face of it, inconsistent.

To the question 'Are they God?' he replied: 'They are not God; they help one to concentrate on God.' This, it is obvious, is

roughly equivalent to the Catholic view of the veneration of images. But he then went on to say: '*All* is God, so this stone, this statue and so on.' He presumably meant that such things are not God in any exclusive sense, only in the general sense by which in this theory all things are God, all being just different aspects of God. My next questions aimed at getting him to elucidate this. I suggested that the fact that *all* things are God could hardly be a reason for venerating one thing more than another; moreover surely some things are more perfect manifestations of God than others on his own hypothesis: the monkey perched on the verandah balustrade listening in a couple of yards away is not God in the same degree, presumably, as you and I; a stone not in the same degree as the monkey. Why then pick on a stone? 'Yes, that is so; but they are all equally God.' 'You mean, then, that one can take anything, since God is present in all things, or literally *is* all things, and, since it is impossible to centre the mind on the whole world at once, it is concentrated on this one specific thing or symbol—is that the idea?' 'Yes.'

This concept is not, of course, so very far removed from that of the western poet who can 'see the world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower', or the man to whom 'the meanest flower that blows can bring thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'—go deeply enough into anything and you will come to God. And such focusing of the mind on one point or object is, in yogic meditation, the first stage to immersion in God. But I doubt very much if this is the true explanation, or at least the complete explanation, of the Hindu use of images, I think it more likely that the belief at least implicit in their use is similar to that of the Russian and Greek Christian Church regarding eikons: the eikon entails in some degree the sacramental presence of the deity or saint it is intended to represent, some degree, that is, of *re-presentation* in the literal sense of making present. The soul of the painter is in spiritual communion with his subject, the subject is *in* him to that extent, and he gives this spiritual reality a material shape and vehicle in the form of the eikon. Catholics moreover believe that the Church, through its possession and ministry by divine institution of the whole work and activity of Christ for the redemption ('realization') of men, may give to a picture or to any material object through a formal

blessing a sacramental quality, making it, that is, a channel of grace, fundamentally a channel of the presence of God, for the one who uses it in the proper manner. The presence of God entails, of course, the presence of the saint whose whole life and being is only a limited participation in and manifestation of God through Christ; but our own limitations often make the saint a more easily comprehensible approach to God: it is God we approach in this restricted form. I think something of this is implicit in the Hindu practice.

It is probable that the same implications are to be seen in the idea already mentioned, to be met in some parts of India and Tibet, that by long contemplation of a sacred representation the mind becomes filled with it and the deity represented takes possession of the viewer; the contemplative becomes transformed into that which he beholds.[1] It is fundamentally the same idea that the mantric theory expresses in terms of vibrations. To pronounce the name of someone is to make him present—the Hindu would probably say present in a higher, because more immaterial, way[2] than by physical incarnation—and so the repetition of the sacred OM is to induce the presence of God. By continual repetition the devotee becomes filled with the vibrations of this name, or perhaps a better analogy, begins himself to vibrate on the same wave-length, to become God.

I have a feeling that the small Catholic child who lights a candle before the statue of his favourite saint knows something of all this, although he would be unable to formulate it. He knows that the roots of his being are in God; more, that God is present, living in him; that when he thinks and moves it is God thinking and moving and, since the saints and angels and his fellow-men are also in the same way in God and God in them, he is also in the most intimate contact with them as well in the very depths of his being. All that he sees outside him is only the gross—beautiful as it is—material reflection of what is the inner essence of his own life. All this he knows very well, when he lights his candle; that the saint is really present, as

[1] Cf. p. 91.

[2] For the Pseudo-Denys oral tradition is a higher mode of transmission than the written word because it is less material, more incorporeal. For Old Testament Hebrew a 'commemoration' was more than a mere recalling, rather approaching the idea of 're-calling' in the literal sense of calling back.

close to him as he is to himself—even closer than he is to his surface, superficial self—that they mingle and are one. But because he is a human child he likes to give the saint a material form on which he can feast his eyes, and again, because he is human and must show his reverence and affection by *doing* something, he lights a candle, communicating something of himself in material form to the saint. The statue represents the saint, even 're-presents' him in the sense of making him present again to the extent that—unlovely as it may be—it gives material expression to a presence which is a reality.[1]

Whether the swami saw it in this light but had either not the time or the desire so to express it I do not know. It was obvious by this time that he was becoming restive and that I could not try his patience much further; he had gone as far as he was prepared to go. I therefore proceeded to thank him for his kindness and patience and made to leave. I would have liked to return to the topic of the siddhis and full realization, but this clearly would have been more than he could take. I had, however, one shot still remaining in my locker and this I delivered after the manner of a Parthian shot while actually standing and making my departure.

I produced from my pocket, perhaps a little like a conjuror producing a rabbit out of a hat, a cutting from *The Times of India*. It contained a review of a book published in India by the Yogoda Sat-Sanga Society: *The Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramhansa Yogananda. The review describes this book as 'a very readable account of the life of a yogi—now in its seventh edition—from his boyhood in Bengal to his death in California'. It goes on to express regret that the book is rather 'an account of external events—the yogis he met and the miracles he saw—than of his own spiritual development' (in this reversing, it will be noted, the order of importance assigned by all good yogis). The reviewer also finds it 'irritating' that the book tries to 'make yoga acceptable to the western reader by making it appear as though it were no more than a Hindu version of the Christian creed'. The sketches of the holy men with whom the writer

[1] Readers may recall the incident of the Christian knights (I forget the context—*Chanson de Roland*?) who, unable to receive Holy Communion before battle, ate a few blades of grass as a material symbol of spiritual communion.

lived are praised, 'men whose very touch might help to bring salvation'. Here comes what was to me the most striking part, since it seemed that it might offer the chance of meeting in one and the same person a perfectly realized yogi who also practised the siddhis and had acquired universal dominion.

One of the holy men the author claimed to have lived with, who persuaded him to undertake a mission to spread the knowledge of (*Kriya*) yoga in the West, was 'Babaji. He is the guru of Shankara's guru and is the inventor of Kriya Yoga.' My knowledge of Hindu history is of the slightest, but I thought I knew that 'the guru of Shankara's guru' was an historical person who lived in the eighth century A.D., regarded by Hindus as an avatar who had even then lived for as much as two thousand years. Yet here he was, apparently still alive and hob-nobbing with Americans in the Himalayas in the twentieth century, for the review continues: 'Still alive, he moves from place to place in the Himalayas with a band of followers among whom are two highly advanced American disciples.'

I asked my swamiji if he knew the book and the author. He did. Was I right in thinking that the Babaji spoken of with such veneration was really round about three thousand years old? Yes, I was. 'And that he is still alive and travels in the Himalayas?' 'Yes, he is still alive.' I asked if the swami knew where he was at the moment or the most likely route I should take in order to find him; I would gladly prolong my visit if there were a chance of doing this; no one I had met on my travels had even mentioned this most remarkable personage. The swami replied that it was almost impossible to find him: 'He materializes at will and appears to whom he chooses.' 'Do you mean that he is not normally present bodily in the Himalayas, but appears in bodily form there from time to time?' 'Yes, that is so.' 'So that I might travel there all my life looking for him, yet never find him?' 'Yes [with a laugh, the first I had succeeded in producing]; that is so.' 'What then of the two "highly advanced American disciples" and the rest of his band of followers; are they present there in the body or only in the spirit; or do they too appear and disappear at will?' (On the principle that 'where the body is there will the eagles be gathered together' one might hope by following the eagles to come in time to the body.) He replied that he did not know.

Perhaps it did not matter; I had a kind of 'hunch' that I was not quite the sort of person to whom Babaji would choose to appear. (In fact the book, at least in the English edition, does speak of him 'moving from place to place', sometimes by walking in the normal manner, at other times instantaneously 'with his group'; he may take up his *danda* and the whole group will vanish instantaneously. Perhaps it is not of importance, but he is said to be red-headed and to look about twenty-five years of age; he is, of course, fair-skinned.)[1]

It seemed that the object of my search had now brought me back to the point at which I started, the vast solitudes of the Himalayas, and that I might travel all my life without finding it. I again thanked my mentor, apologizing for my importunity and insatiable thirst for knowledge, and descended the steps to the road. The small monkey continued to sit on the rail of the verandah, looking after me with a sad, pensive stare. It seemed to be saying to itself: 'And there, but for the grace of God, go I.'

I was able to be present at another darshan of the Swami Sivananda before leaving the district, this time from the moment at which he entered the office leaning on his assistants, and the proceedings opened with the plaintive little hymn intoned by the lady swami and repeated verse by verse by the whole assembly. It followed the same pattern. People came and spoke to him; stood up and recited set little speeches, sometimes explaining all the Swami meant in their lives, at others simply repeating little slogans they had presumably learned from him: 'If we do not see the evil of others, others' evil will not harm us' was one typical declaration that I recall in a very earnest little piece by a middle-aged lady. It seemed to me unduly optimistic, but no doubt it is in harmony with Hindu thought. Possibly she intended to say no more than Socrates' 'Nothing can harm a good man', but it is typical of Hindu religious language that one immediately begins to ask what it means, then whether it means anything at all, and finally one may be reduced to compressing it within a mould of one's own. The

[1] Perhaps the 'of course' requires an explanation. Fair skin is the more highly esteemed in India. Advertisements and pictures of film stars almost invariably depict people with white skin, and the numerous advertisements for brides of suitable caste and other qualifications usually stipulate also that they should be fair-skinned.

Swami at times just read to himself as his devotees sat round him; from time to time secretaries brought him papers for signature. The tall young American was in his accustomed place, gazing straight before him, but whether in deep meditation or just bewilderment I was not quite sure. Again there was a little pilgrimage of schoolboys, most of them just passing through and making their bow as the Swami struck up his little chant, entering at one door, filing past his couch and leaving by the other.

LUNCH—'THE MONKEYS WILL ATTACK YOU'

I had come in at the far end of the room and remained at the back of the crowd hoping to escape notice and, I confess, hoping I would not be invited to stay to lunch. My Irish hosts had thoughtfully provided me with ham sandwiches, apples and a flask of coffee. At the end of the darshan, when the Swami had departed, I made my way with these strange meats out of the ashram and sat on the parapet of a little bridge a few yards from the entrance, overlooking the river, to take my lunch, hoping that the passing sadhus would not notice what I was eating. I shared my apples with a small boy who had taken up his seat at a respectful distance but made no attempt to beg. To have offered him a sandwich might, I felt, have laid me open to a charge of corrupting the young; so I refrained.

As I sat there munching a pukka swami came up and said sharply: 'You ought not to sit there.' I was a little taken aback by the sharpness of his tone, so unlike the general spirit of the ashram, yet not able to imagine what I was doing wrong; unless it was my ham sandwiches, and I had already crammed the remainder of one into my mouth hoping he would not notice it. However, he went on to say: 'The monkeys will attack you,' indicating the flat roofs of the buildings just below the parapet of the wall, which afforded an easy approach. I thanked him for the warning, promised to be on my guard, and moved my position a little to a spot where I could not be taken unawares. I think that he did not mean literally 'attack', only that a hairy arm was likely to dart out, snatch my food from my hand, and disappear like a flash. The old priest at Ranikhet had told me that his dinner had been snatched away in this manner as the

bearer was carrying it across the small open space from the kitchen to the dining-room. In fact no monkey appeared here and it is possible that the small boy was my protector. Indian boys, in defiance of their religious convictions, are fond of pursuing monkeys with catapults and are consequently feared by monkeys as their natural enemies. Whether the knowledge is imparted to young monkeys at birth or it is part of the inherited instinct of the race I cannot tell, but it is a fact that whenever a small party of boys is at large monkeys disappear like magic. Your monkey seems to know when he has met his match.

On this occasion I walked the two or three miles back into the village of Rishikesh, allowing myself time to catch the bus due to leave for Dehra Dun. I passed numerous sadhus on the road. What I assumed was a small sadhu's cave-dwelling intrigued me as I passed and I would have been glad to visit the occupant. Unfortunately he was apparently not at home, since the door, only about two by three feet, set in the rock, was padlocked from the outside. At the side of the door was a little pile of firewood. At one spot about half-way between Sivanandanagar and Rishikesh I stopped to read an English inscription on the plastered wall of a small building at the side of the road. The inscription, covering the whole surface of the wall, about ten feet by seven or eight, was an advertisement for Ayurvedic medicines, of which the most important ingredient, if one was to believe the statement, was Ganges water: 'Ayurvedic . . . men learned in the art of healing are advised to use . . . made with pure Ganges water.'

'You will not find a yogi,' my Indian colleague had told me: 'You will not find a yogi; you will hear about them, but you will not find one.' Well, I had heard about them, but I had not found one. As I advanced so they tended to advance before me like the lines of a distant horizon, or to flit about so elusive that I might travel all my life and never see them. I heard about them, but I never found one.

'YOU WILL NOT FIND A YOGI'

There, I suppose, for all practical purposes, my quest came to an end. I had not found one of whom it could be said with reasonable certainty that he had attained to what a Christian

would call sanctity as distinct from mere exceptional goodness. Still less had I found one who had already reached that final state of man, to which the Christian looks forward only after the resurrection of the body at the last day, which is implied in Hindu 'realization' with its perfect emancipation and universal dominion over the body and the world it inhabits. (I must leave to the reader's judgement the claims of the Rishikesh swami: I have tried to report the discussion as faithfully as I can.) Even the holiest of Christians is not technically a 'saint' so long as he is in this world; he is still *in via*, on the way, not having yet attained. His state is much lower than the hypothetical Hindu 'realization' and will not reach its full completion until the last day. In the broad sense all baptized Christians may be called 'saints' in the sense that they already possess the life which, unless it is deliberately rejected, is destined to find its full development and 'realization' in heaven; but in this world it is still the seed or germ rather than the mature fruit.

When I say that I could not find a yogi I realize that I am stating only my own personal judgement. It might be argued that I could not recognize a saint if I met one. There is not really any reply to that except to note that the ability to recognize sanctity does not necessarily imply any pronounced degree of sanctity in the beholder; in fact it may happen that the bad hat recognizes by sheer contrast that he is in the presence of more than just ordinary, or extraordinary, goodness, in the presence of something rather that is more than merely human. I can only repeat my opinion that I think I could have recognized an eminent degree of sanctity had I met it; at least I should have said to myself: Here there may be something that will repay a little closer enquiry: but I never did. Obviously it is impossible for me to say that there *were* no examples of eminent holiness to be found simply because I did not find any. I do, however, think that if they had existed in large numbers I could hardly have failed to have heard of or seen some of them; and if there had been, in the districts I visited, any quite outstanding 'saint', particularly one whose teaching was confirmed by the performance of miracles, actions which could admit of no purely human, natural explanation, in that case I think it impossible that I should not have heard of him. I am prepared to accept the judgement of the sadhu in the Himalayas: 'Saints are

no more common in India than anywhere else; if in the course of a long life you meet one man who has had a glimpse of the light, it is very much.'

But that, in any case, would have been only the incomplete sanctity, the 'beginnings of goodness', in the Christian sense, the promise rather than the fine flower: I will not press that. I could find no trace at all of a true yogi in the yogi's own sense of complete realization, nor could I find anyone who knew one or could tell me where to find one. If I am told that I must take it on faith that such men exist, though I may not see them, then without sufficient grounds for credibility I claim the right to doubt.

Regarding the extraordinary powers described by Patanjali, the siddhis, which are, in the yogis' own view, at a level lower than full realization, are developed by purely natural means, and need have no religious significance, again I can only say that I met no one who possessed them, nor could anyone tell me of one who had them. In the solitary case of the Rishikesh swami who claimed (contradicted by the unhesitating statement of his colleague) that all the swamis there had these powers, there was also the declaration that they had never been known to use them. I do believe there are so-called preternatural and psychic powers that may be developed by purely natural means and I think we do not yet know the limits of these powers, but the fact is they seem to appear more often involuntarily, from a natural physical aptitude rather than as the result of conscious effort, and they are usually feared and unwanted by those who have them. I expected to find such powers more common in India than in the West, but so far as my own very limited investigations went it seemed that they were not. Here again it is most unlikely that I could have failed to hear of anyone in the districts I passed through who had the siddhis or even less spectacular powers; it is impossible that any considerable number of men did such things without my hearing of it. The conclusion is therefore parallel to the judgement of the swami concerning sanctity, that the marvellous is not more common here than elsewhere.

Perhaps that last statement requires a certain qualification. The ordinary Indian, and more particularly the uneducated Indian, has a great appetite for the marvellous; and where the

appetite exists you will usually find someone ready to satisfy it. Travelling jugglers, magicians and 'holy men' abound and find a ready welcome. Moreover the Indian, with his keen sense of the unseen world as more real than the world of phenomena, tends to accept as miraculous events that can be explained as the result of purely natural forces, and hard on the death of a reputedly holy man there springs up a crop of legends which, on examination, are seen to have no basis in what the westerner calls fact. This, as we have seen, is not peculiar to the East, but at the present day it is more commonly found there. There is no doubt too that things do happen there that at first sight seem to have no natural explanation, but these are certainly far more rare than we of the West imagine, perhaps—I am speaking of genuine phenomena—not more common than such happenings elsewhere. For us the East still tends to remain 'mysterious' and we more easily give credence to unusual happenings there than we would to similar occurrences at home: we expect marvels, magic and the like and enjoy it when we get them. We sometimes forget that we may be equally mysterious to the East. I remember a few years ago at a meeting of the Asiatic Society (I think that is the name) on Television, an attractive young Indian girl student saying, in a tone of slight resentment and apparent frustration: 'English people say we are mysterious, but we find them mysterious.' I am sure this is right and that the average Indian finds the average Englishman completely mystifying and inexplicable: meeting silence he assumes that it is a pregnant silence when it is frequently only the silence of the void.

BLACK MAGIC

There remains a hard core of strange happenings in India; whether they are brought about by natural means or through the intervention of evil spirits I think it is not possible for anyone to know with certainty. A full investigation of this would probably be rewarding, but it was not part of the assignment I had set myself and is therefore beyond the limits of this book. It is, however, necessary to mention it because 'black magic', what has been called the 'Black Art of Kerala', and the use of mantras, whether for good or bad ends, is closely linked with

the system known as Tantrism, on which kundalini yoga is based and which is the source of most of the erotic element in Hinduism and in general its more objectionable features.

Just as there are mantras to produce beneficial effects so there are others, *mantravadams*, to propitiate evil spirits, especially of the minor poltergeist type, or to bring harm or death to an enemy. As I have already mentioned when speaking of protective mantras, they are popularly spoken of as working through the agency of spirits, good or evil, are usually in the form of an invocation, and are accompanied, at least in black magic, by puja. It cannot, however, be simply assumed because of this that these are any more than impersonal powers or energies. These mantras and mantravadams are considered, at least by the philosophical school in which they have their origin, to be not so much prayers (though the distinction might not mean much to the adherents of the school) as a form of words which sets off an intricate mechanical action and reaction. The universe itself is the effect of a particularly potent mantra, so naturally variations on the theme may produce such modifications of the universe as one may desire, if one has the right formula.[1]

Though *Shaktism* and the tantric literature seems to have had its origin in Bengal (the matter is disputed) it is Southern India, and especially Kerala, that is the home of black magic in India, where it is taught as an art by professionals to specially chosen disciples. I have no first-hand knowledge of this, but it seems[2] that the black art of this district is Dravidian in origin and existed when the Indo-Aryans arrived. It has repulsive elements common to sorcery and witchcraft in other parts of the world, makes use of incantations or mantras, and it seems impossible that there should not have been interchange of ideas and practices between Shaktism and this indigenous black art—but I speak here only *a priori*. However, it is said that the more notorious of the professional magicians and sorcerers of the district, of the lower castes and tribes, are of this Dravidian

[1] In considering this and similar concepts the reader will find it helpful to recall again the basic scheme of the Pseudo-Denys for whom the stream of Light is also a single Word, the pattern of which is repeated in diminishing degrees of perfection, in the lower part of its course emerging as the visible world: the Logos, the One Word, containing all other words, through whom all things were made and continue in being.

[2] Cf. *Outline of Hinduism*, p. 115.

stock. Spells and incantations are, of course, common throughout India among the poorer people and are the first-aid in sickness.

Typical of the things one does hear is an account given me by a young student concerning a man of his acquaintance described as a 'bad guru', meant apparently to denote a practitioner of the black art. I mention this case because the young man was of a distinctly critical and even sceptical mentality. He was a high caste Hindu, educated in a well-known Catholic school (though not himself a Christian), and at the time I met him was teaching in another Catholic college with a high reputation; he was at the same time doing post-graduate work for a doctorate of philosophy. He was a typical modern Hindu, western in dress, habits and outlook, and though the subject of the thesis on which he was working was the philosophy and teaching of a famous Hindu scholar and reputed saint, and involved a thorough knowledge of Hindu philosophy in general, he told me frankly that he had no belief whatever in the alleged marvels of the 'saint'. He was, that is, an educated man with a highly developed critical faculty and, though a Hindu, his mind had been coloured since childhood by his western and Christian associations. He was less likely than most to accept as preternatural or magical any unusual occurrence.

He told me that this 'bad guru', who had in fact been his mother's guru or spiritual director, was capable of killing a man at a distance by what, for lack of a better term, I shall call black magic; he had been known to use this power and was greatly feared in consequence. The young man had no doubt at all of this and I was satisfied that he was sincere. A small, crude, earthenware pot was, he said, sent through the air—the distance was immaterial—and struck the man in the chest so that he died. No one saw it coming: like some super V2 it just arrived. He did not know how it was done, but he was quite convinced that it *was* done and he claimed to have been present on one occasion, as a boy, when the goods had, so to speak, been delivered. I asked if there was anything peculiar about the pot, if, for instance, there was anything inside it. He said it contained a small figure of a man discharging an arrow from a bow. On arrival it appeared to be red-hot and to enter the breast of the victim. He believed the pot did indeed travel through the

air, but this was, of course, only conjecture since no one actually saw it in flight. I relate this simply as I received it without comment except to remark that it has a certain superficial resemblance to the exploits of the African 'lightning makers' who claim to be able to strike their victims with lightning and so destroy them. Graham Greene, in *Journey without Maps*, gives an account of a matrimonial tangle in which a wronged husband killed his wife and her lover in this way without harming the baby who was lying in the bed between the two. This incident, he considers, was well vouched for and he found that both whites and blacks believed in this power.

This recalls an incident that more properly belongs to the sphere of mantras in general than to black magic. There is in the Poona district—I could never spare the time to visit it—a large stone beneath a tree, requiring several strong men to move it an inch or two, but if the correct mantra is recited over it in a loud voice it is said to rise in the air of its own accord. This is generally believed in the district. One of the Jesuit Fathers (an Indian) at St. Vincent's High School told me that one of his pupils had actually seen this happen. He was quite certain the boy was telling the truth. I would prefer to say that the boy was convinced that he saw it happen, so leaving it open whether perhaps he may have been subjected to hypnotic suggestion. A party of the Fathers one half-holiday decided to go and test this for themselves, but at the last moment changed their minds, fearing that it might give scandal.

There does exist in India widespread fear of spells, witchcraft and black magic in general, even among low caste Christians, and especially among the Tamils of Southern India. This may have amusing, if exasperating, consequences when they come to the priest for a baptismal certificate for some reason. After twenty years or so it may be impossible to trace their name in the register, the reason being that they have had several names since baptism and none of these was their true name: they have to remember the name they went by at the time of baptism. A spell cannot, of course, affect a person unless you know his true name. I presume that originally this was based on the idea that the name was the expression of the inner being of the person putting you in touch with his vibrations and 'wave-length'.

There is no doubt that numerous stories of this kind could be

unearthed in India, but it is impossible to assess their value without a careful systematic investigation of each separate case on the spot. It is also certain that the marvellous is for the Indian something that might happen to anyone at any time rather than, as more generally in the West, something that could never happen here. This same young man I have mentioned told me of an acquaintance, a student of the psychic and occult, who was never to be found during a certain period in the evening. It was quite by chance that he discovered that this period was regularly devoted to telepathic communication with a friend in the U.S.A. He was not able to tell me whether communication was in fact established or whether the operation was merely at the experimental stage. India is a country where such things—occurrences or experiments—are taken for granted, and not the least problem is to know when people are speaking of something they would like to do or hope to do and when they are describing something they have actually done: to have conceived the notion of it, one is led to believe, is almost more important than having done it; and if the spiritual, the world of the mind, is the only reality and the rest illusion—why not?

CHRISTIAN YOGA?

I hope no one will assume from anything I have said in the preceding pages that I see no positive value in Hinduism or in yoga. To my mind the most valuable element of Hinduism is that 'awareness of God' alluded to by the sadhu in the hills. This sense of the all-embracing presence of God must be apparent to the most superficial observer. The feeling that all things *are* in some mysterious way God, that in Him 'we live and move and have our being', is an inestimable boon to the whole world and, if it serves to recall Christians of the West to this element in their own faith, it may come as a powerful corrective to an excessive legalism in western religious practice. I must, however, warn my fellow-Christians that if they expect to find in Hinduism, Buddhism or yoga a religious system leading to heights of spirituality and mysticism unknown to Christianity, they will be sadly disillusioned. Time and again in examining Hindu beliefs and discussing them with their professional exponents and practitioners, the swamis and sadhus, I became aware that they

gave me a new angle on my own beliefs, or perhaps more accurately threw into high relief some aspect of it. I learned nothing new but I acquired a new perspective and found aspects of my belief receiving new and refreshing emphasis; but how much of this came from Hinduism itself and how much from my own ruminations along certain lines of thought I am not so sure. I became increasingly aware how inadequate in themselves as a guide to life were the partial, isolated glimpses of the truth offered by Hinduism, accompanied by so much that was false and misleading. It was only because I saw them in the light of a divine revelation in which all these partial truths fall each into its proper place that I could appreciate the positive value inherent in Hinduism and see how in many points they gave an inspiring insight into Christian truths. Anyone who doubts this has only to cast a glance at the number of conflicting religious and philosophical schools that have arisen in India during the past three thousand years, all claiming to interpret the Hindu sacred books. Still Hinduism as such does not, as we have seen, claim to offer a system or a body of teaching; it is rather a manner of approach, a mentality, an attitude. It is, however, yoga with which we are directly concerned here, and this does offer within Hinduism a system (or number of systems). Since these are becoming known in the West through books and even, as we saw, newspaper advertisements, my readers may wonder what attitude they should adopt to them; whether they are useful, useless, positively harmful, and whether they are compatible with Christianity.

My purpose was to find out *if* yoga worked, not *how* it worked; if it did indeed produce true yogis who became identified with the 'Cosmic Consciousness', the Ultimate Reality, and on the way to this acquired complete dominion over the visible universe. If I had ascertained that it did this, then it might have been worth while enquiring *how* it was done. As it is I have no intention of providing a practical guide to yoga and shall confine myself to a few general observations.

In the first place yoga is most commonly represented in the West as a system of what the westerner regards as physical exercises or gymnastics, joined sometimes to breathing exercises. To the extent that this may help to produce a healthy body as a more responsive instrument for a healthy mind, and assist in

restoring a lost harmony between body and soul, it may have a positive value. Some Christians who have tried it assert that it has this effect. Still this, as we know, is not all that yoga expects of it. These 'exercises' are based on a very complex and rather abstruse biological and philosophical theory and have as their aim the awakening of the energy or vital principle in man until it dominates completely his body with its material environment and finally is merged in and identified with the one Ultimate Reality. The yogi, that is, expects that it will bring him to salvation: the Christian may expect rather less; he will be content if it helps to provide the natural basis for 'super-nature' or grace. Yet is there in fact so great a difference between these two attitudes, or are they not rather each saying something of the truth yet neither the whole truth? This leads to the next observation.

The expectations of the yogi that he may attain to salvation by his own natural efforts and the manipulation of material things and forces must be balanced against his conviction that he and God are one, any distinction is illusion, and similarly matter and spirit, nature and supernature are the same and one with God. The Christian, though speaking of 'nature' as though it were something he had of right, a separate sphere independent of God and without reference or relevance to the supernatural, would in fact agree, if you asked him, that he had nothing that he had not received, that 'nature' too is 'grace' in the sense of a free gift of God, and God is present in it as its very being. The Hindu, however, though you would find it difficult if not impossible to extract from him a firm, clear statement, would almost certainly say that he was uncreated, at least in the Christian sense of the term,[1] and co-eternal with God, had

[1] Christian mystics do sometimes speak of the 'uncreated ground' of the soul, meaning, I think, much the same as the Hindu, the point at which the creature is united with and receives his being from the Creator, the point at which the creature meets in God his 'idea' in the 'divine mind' which has always been there, uncreated and identical with God (cf. p. 229 with note). The development or 'realization' of the creature is his approach to his 'idea' in God (the idea which is not just a model but the actual source of his being), and since this is identical with God, his approach is towards identity with God which is also the perfection of his own distinct existence. It is the ultimate paradox of created being, reflecting that of the Trinity, of which losing one's life in order to find it and approaching things by walking away from them is our human expression.

everything of right and had received nothing. The Christian looks for everything from God, whether natural or supernatural; of himself he is nothing. The Hindu considers he already has everything there is to have, could he only realize it; there is nothing outside himself, not even God.

The practical point is that the Christian in his use of yoga (if he is determined to use it, though there is no compelling reason why he should) must beware of supposing that he is thereby reaching salvation by his own efforts, without God. That is not the Hindu idea; it may be what he seems to the westerner to say but it is not what he means.

My next observation is that although yogic methods of recollecting and concentrating the attention may be useful for mental prayer, there is an obvious danger in deliberately inducing a state of samadhi, trance or ecstasy. This may be accompanied by an unleashing of the subconscious or by possible suggestion from without, either from other human beings or from diabolic powers or preternatural forces; and here it must be remembered that in Hindu tradition the guidance of a guru is considered essential and in the Christian tradition, in which all this finds its fulfilment, infallible guidance is assured through the priesthood of the Catholic Church. It is, of course, an abnormal condition. That deep absorption in which a person is oblivious of himself and of all around him while yet retaining consciousness and the use of his faculties is obviously desirable. This corresponds roughly to the minor degree of samadhi, the *savikalpa* as distinguished from the *nirvikalpa*, but it is likely that in fact there is a fluctuation between the two, except in complete trance. This leads directly to the next observation.

Where such a system does open wide a door to delusion is in the basic notion that by wishing for a thing hard enough one can get it, or that for the attainment of a personal condition or an external state of things thinking makes it so. Even here I would remark again that we have not yet fully explored the extent to which the body may become the instrument of the spirit, and matter itself, including man's external environment, be controlled by it. Our Lord did speak of a faith that literally moves mountains, but I presume that he himself was to be the power through which this was to be done and that it would entail a perfect harmony and union of will between Christ and

the operator; a man would not go throwing mountains about at his own sweet choice as a morning exercise. Yoga expects that in complete (*nirvikalpa*) samadhi the yogi will become identified with the object of his contemplation, not just mentally but completely, on every plane of being: only for the Hindu there is no such distinction, all other things are so many ways in which the mind apprehends God and have no objective reality apart from God. One can adjust the world by adjusting one's mental attitude towards it. One can see the idea but the danger also is obvious. One may easily persuade oneself that a thing or a situation is so when in fact it is not: on a small scale we all do it. The experience of Ramakrishna, one of the best-known modern Hindus and the prophet of the new Hinduism, may be taken as an example.

He claimed to have experienced in his own person the equality, truth and identity of all religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism, Christianity. His experience of Christianity was confirmed, it is claimed, by Christ, who appeared to him in bodily form accompanied by 'a voice that came up from the depths of Ramakrishna's heart' assuring him that it was none other than 'that Master-Yogin Jesus'. It seems to me very unlikely. He tried all religions and found that they were all equally true. His method was to identify himself as closely as possible with the religion, person or thing, literally entering into it or allowing it to enter him until he had become one with it, 'realized' it in himself. In this way he is said to have 'realized' that he was both a brahmin and an untouchable by first dressing, eating, speaking and in general behaving like a brahmin and then, when he had fully 'realized' this, living as an untouchable or pariah. He 'realized' that he was both woman as well as man by dressing, acting and speaking as a woman—and so on: he became literally all things and in him all religions were resolved into a single identity. It is only a logical consequence that since his death (he did die) there should appear a *Gospel of Ramakrishna*, based on, but of course superseding, the Christian gospel.[1] My point is the danger of self-delusion.

The final observation: I suggest that in the present state of our knowledge it might be unwise to sniff too noisily at the Hindu notion of 'waves' and 'vibrations', alluded to here briefly

[1] Cf. *Outline of Hinduism*, pp. 340 ff.

in connection with mantras, and the idea that material phenomena are somehow the production of mind or spirit. Modern physical science suggests something very similar, that the ultimate basis of all material phenomena is an unextended force or energy, and that the material extension and other sensible qualities of the visible world are the result of the mind's apprehension of a quasi-spiritual reality, that what men commonly regard as par excellence the *real*, the *solid* world in fact has its origin in the mind of man. I am speaking only of the trend of modern theories. There is, however, a close analogy to the scheme proposed by the *hierarchies* of the Areopagite,[1] where man stands at the source of material things, at the point where the world of phenomena emerges, and knows—and possesses—it there at its source as well as in its ultimate debouching. I do not confidently expect in my own lifetime to be able to dematerialize myself and reconstitute my body in the place to which my mind or thought has travelled, but this may be as good a description as any of what I hope I may achieve once I have passed beyond this world.

Since my reference to the 'Black Box', the de la Warr instrument,[2] judgement has been given in favour of the maker. This does not, of course, mean that the judge considered the 'box' did work, only that he was satisfied that the maker honestly thought it did or could. However, evidence given suggested that other people were convinced that it had in fact been used successfully in diagnosing and curing diseases.

THE 'NEW-LOOK' HINDUISM—RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Since I have spoken of Ramakrishna it may be useful to mention very briefly the Ramakrishna Mission founded by his disciple Vivekananda; it is typical of the 'new-look' Hinduism and in particular of the kind that is prepared for export to the West. This is a consciously missionary movement, home and foreign, of a more radical kind than that of Sivanandanagar, with centres in many parts of the world, including a small ashram of two swamis at Muswell Hill, London, and a number of houses in the U.S.A. In this respect there is a certain analogy between it and the 'active' religious orders of the Christian

[1] Cf. p. 29. [2] Cf. p. 229.

Church. Aspirants have to spend a period of seven to nine years in some kind of social, charitable work before initiation as swamis (this is traceable to the impression made upon Vivekananda by the charitable activities he saw in Europe and America); after initiation they may alternate between contemplation and action or devote themselves exclusively to action, i.e., works of charity. This is how it was explained to me by the Mission, but I gather that all must have as its aim personal 'realization'.

Before leaving Dehra Dun I took the opportunity of visiting a small ashram of the Mission a few miles away in order to get some information at first hand and gain a general impression. It was an ashram of five monks, but of these I saw only one. He admitted that this was a 'new-look' Hinduism and did not meet with the approval of all sadhus. He met me wearing leather sandals, though what species of animal the leather came from I cannot say. We sat down on chairs in the garden and he produced a paper packet of cigarettes and offered me one. I do not smoke so refused, but he took one himself and lit up. I have never seen a sadhu smoking, either before or since, and I found it, combined with the leather sandals, rather diverting. I am not sure if he was an habitual smoker or was merely doing it to impress me with his breadth of mind, emancipation and familiarity with the ways of Christian sadhus. He took more than one from his packet during the conversation, though I cannot remember that I noticed much smoking after the lighting up. It is a small point but indicative of the new look. Progress is the keynote of this sect and for that reason it has no dogmas; they are out of date and too constricting in a progressive world. This rejection of all dogma and religious belief was one of the basic ideas of Ramakrishna. I refrained from asking whither they were progressing.

A religion that has no dogmas does not afford much scope for discussion. However the swami began, rather surprisingly, by asking me to excuse him if he spoke rather dogmatically in explaining the work and aims of the Mission. It seemed that they might have some dogmas after all, even if it was only the dogma that they had no dogmas. I assured the swami that this was just what I wanted: to know his views. He then gave me the impression of reciting a set piece, with apt, well-chosen quota-

tions and illustrations, that he had produced many times before. He went through his piece, answering questions as to fact, but it was almost impossible to draw him into discussion of any specific point; he tended to go back and just repeat part of his speech. The central point of it was, as might have been expected from a disciple of Ramakrishna, that all religions are the same, all equal, only different aspects of *one* religion; all lead to the same goal, but one form of religion is more suited to one person than another. This last was the point on which he insisted most strongly. Their founder had no desire at all to convert anyone to his own form of religion; all he wished was to make people better Christians, better Moslems, better Hindus. My object was to learn his point of view so I forbore from pointing out to him that it was rather contradictory to seek to make Christians better Christians, since the one thing Christians insisted on above all else was that theirs is the only one, true universal religion, which therefore excludes his own; or to recall the zest with which Hindus and Moslems set about slaughtering one another on the British withdrawal, hardly suggesting complete unity in heart and mind. What in effect he was trying to establish was an entirely new religion, without dogma, formless and indefinable, and so for all practical purposes non-existent: but he would not have seen the point of such an argument.

What he resented most strongly was that Christians should try to convert Hindus and others to their own religion: 'How is it possible for a Hindu to become a Christian? It is impossible for me to change my faith or my guru for yours. I might say your faith is my faith but it would not alter the fact.' There is a strange distorted logic about this that is typically Indian.[1] Perhaps he thought I had come to convert him. Anyway, having said his piece and dealt summarily with my most pressing enquiries he escaped as rapidly as possible.

He had described briefly how Ramakrishna had been in turn Hindu, Moslem, Christian and finally had conceived the idea of his mission; the foundation of the mission and spread of the movement through his disciple Vivekananda. I have called it a 'mission' and so it describes itself, and though it disclaims any wish to make converts it considers itself to have a universal mission described to me briefly as no less than the mission to

[1] 'As things have been they remain.' Cf. p. 57.

'interpret the East not only to the West but also to the East'; to explain to all the religions of the world what their religions really are and what it is they really believe. It is a typically grandiose scheme such as is easily born from prolonged introspection and withdrawal from external realities. Again I must say that so far as I can discover the founders of the society were earnest, devoted and well-meaning men. I have no first-hand information about their charitable work, but it must be obvious that it is less a religion than a dissolution of all religions.

Not the least of the 'new look' of this Hinduism was the great order and tidiness of what I saw of the house and garden. No doubt this is a legacy from the founder who was so impressed by what he saw of technical advance and charitable institutions in the West; he presumably also saw that certain standards of cleanliness and order were necessary to recommend his movement there. I made an appreciative remark about the beauty of the garden and attractive appearance of the house. I made no reference, of course, to the dirt and squalor of the average Indian religious establishment, but he caught the point. He deplored the dirty and insanitary habits of many of his fellow-countrymen, condemning them in fact more than I would have done, since dirt has often co-existed with a high degree of culture and morality: but he blamed it all on the British. Under Mogul, and later British, rule the people had been trodden down, they were 'confined, pressed in on themselves and *could* not rise'. He liked Englishmen, at home 'there were no better men, he could even say they were "super-men", but once abroad they developed very bad ways, were quite different'. Now, with independence, the people were able to rise and expand, and very soon I should see a great change; it had already begun.

There was obviously something in this, but it certainly was not the whole truth. Both Moguls and British brought a standard of living and culture considerably higher than the average; the ordinary man was much less oppressed by the British than by his other rulers, and in many places I visited poverty is greater since the British left; I doubt if any of the poorer sort are better off. As one small example from districts that formerly had held British garrison troops, I found that where a married British officer might support seven Indian families by employ-

ing a bearer, cook, sweeper, gardener, dhobi, ayah and the rest, the present Indian officer of the same rank might employ one servant or none at all. Any rise in the standard of living is almost certainly confined to a comparatively very small number of well-to-do, while the poverty of the overwhelming mass of the people remains as it has been for thousands of years. I do believe that effort is being made to improve their lot, but the criticism of the people themselves suggests that this is proceeding all too slowly and, they say, shows lack of proper organization and execution. It is, in any case, quite gratuitous to assert that any progress that has been made would not have been made had the British remained. I do believe that people should be left to run their own country in their own way, while others should be ready to give a helping hand if asked. At the same time this was not the prevalent notion in either West or East when the British entered India. I did not argue this point: I wanted to hear what he had to say.

It was perhaps a little incongruous that next door to the ashram with its claim to be the embodiment of all religions, with a mission to explain them all to one another, there should stand (on the main road between Dehra Dun and Mussourie) the house of the 'Free Finnish Mission'. I knew nothing of the belief and organization of this mission; I had never heard of it before; but it seemed likely that it might be one of those fanatically exclusive sects that hold there is no salvation outside its fold and regards the Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church as the spawn of Satan. I do not know if this is so; the thought occurred to me. In fact I called by mistake at the mission when looking for the ashram. I did not see the notice at the gate until afterwards, but seeing that the drive led in the direction of what was clearly a small Hindu temple I not unnaturally assumed that I had reached my destination. The temple was, as I found later, at the other side of a wall separating the two properties. About half-way up the drive, where it curved round towards a large white bungalow, an enormously fat white dog came bounding towards me barking furiously. I have discovered that dogs are harmless as long as they continue to bark and so, refusing to be intimidated, continued on my way. There was something indefinably European about the bungalow as it came in sight, and un-ashram-like, and as I

approached closer I was able to discern pious pictures and biblical texts on the verandah that hardly seemed compatible with Ramakrishna aspirations. It was too late to retreat now, though my doubts increased, and when an elderly, stout, blonde European lady appeared I had no doubt that I had strayed from my path. It struck me that she was probably accustomed to people asking their way to the Ramakrishna Mission and seemed to take it as all part of the day's work; but it must have been a little discouraging. However, she was very kind and directed me to my goal in a friendly tone; but I wonder if I am too fanciful in thinking that I detected in it also the slightest note of resignation.

It is probably Ramakrishnaism that is principally responsible for the wide diffusion of the modern Hindu slogan: 'All religions are equally true.' But it must be obvious that this attitude itself is equivalent to the establishment of a new religion, for in practice it does not really mean that all religions are equal or equally true; it means rather that they have all been resolved in a higher synthesis which has been realized in the person of Ramakrishna. It has been claimed by an Indian colleague of mine that Hinduism is essentially simply a matter of social customs (I have already suggested that it is a mentality or way of looking at things); you can interpret the religious ideas inherent in these customs in any way you please. It is therefore possible, he concluded, to be a good Hindu and an orthodox Christian at one and the same time. That may be so; even if you give a name to the 'spirits of the storms' of the Christian psalms and call them Indra and apportion out other cosmic phenomena among Varuna, Mitra and the rest, I cannot see what harm it will do. But it is not really as simple as all that. For the Christian, believing that God has revealed himself once for all in one unique Incarnation, 'the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret from all eternity'[1] and instituted one way of salvation for all, it is not possible to admit with the Hindu that other religions are equal and alternative routes. But then the Hindu does not really mean that either; the idea is rather that the essence of all religions is to be found in Hinduism. All religions are equal, but Hinduism is the most equal of all.

[1] *Romans* xvi. 25.

III
Recessional

ANGEL WITH THE RED-VARNISHED TOE-NAILS

I WOULD have liked to be able to visit Gangotri in order to explore the source of the Ganges. I knew that in fact it would hardly be possible in winter but I had intended to try to go part of the way. On the first part of the road I might find other sadhus from whom I could learn something. An examination of the route when I was in Dehra Dun convinced me that I would have neither time nor money enough to attempt it. In summer I might have gone on foot, sleeping out where necessary. In the winter I could not afford to hire car and animals or coolies to go even as far as might prove practicable. Although Gangotri, at a height of 10,000 ft., with its temple dedicated to the Goddess Ganga, is commonly, as I have said, taken as the source of the Ganges, it is generally admitted that its true source is quite uncertain. The Gaumukha glacier, fifteen miles away, is considered by some as more likely to be the real source; others suggest Lake Manasarowar. However, one must choose some definite spot at which to build one's temple, and here it is at Gangotri.

It is possible to travel by bus or car in suitable weather to within 74 miles of Gangotri. The last stage is described in the official guide-book as a 'bridle-path', to be covered with the aid of mules and coolies, in places 'extremely rocky and narrow'. I did notice, however, on the blueprint of the area by an Indian engineer who had surveyed it, that the second part of the motor road was described as only 'jeepable'. But I did not possess a

'jeep' and, as I have said, I had neither the time nor money to attempt it in any other way. I made a mental resolve that if I should find myself in India again at a suitable season and free to do so, I would make the attempt. Who knows if 'Ganga-Matha', Mother Ganges, might have rewarded me by appearing in person 'in a blaze of light', perhaps even accompanied by her younger sister Parvati whose temple, on its hill on the outskirts of the city, I had often viewed at dusk over the roof-tops of Poona, as the lights appeared strung along the line of stone flags leading up to it.

I would have been glad also of the opportunity of following up the tracks of the *yeti* or 'Abominable Snowman', but again I had neither time nor equipment, even if the season had been suitable. I remembered that a couple of years ago a missionary who had lived many years in the hills said he was quite convinced that the 'abominable snowman', far from being abominable, was in fact a type of sadhu who dressed in skins, went barefoot and lived in the remote parts of the Himalayas, presumably in caves. They come down occasionally, he said, to heal sick people in remote villages, especially sick children. It was usually on such expeditions that they were seen by travellers. Apart from these charitable visits they avoided human intercourse and so were hardly ever seen. The very large footprints found in the snow he attributed to the fact that they went barefoot and the warmth of the foot tended to melt the snow round the outline of the print. I presume that the heat of the sun during the day would also tend to enlarge the print, as it does at lower altitudes; but he did not say this. I cannot give a reference for this but readers may remember it. It was said either on a British television programme by the Father or in a statement to a press reporter. It sounds plausible and would have been worth while following up. What if the yeti is, after all, the true yogi?

I did not find a yogi, nor even an abominable snowman; I did not find the spot where Mother Ganga emerges into the visible world. But I cannot refrain from saying, even at the risk of appearing too flippant, that I did, on my way south, meet an angel with red-varnished toe-nails. She (for I suppose it could hardly be he) appeared, as did the angel to Zachary, standing at the right hand of the altar of incense towards the end of mass.

Possibly she derived some support from a stone pedestal, but there she was suspended between heaven and earth with her toes on a level with my eyes as I began to read the last gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.' I was not struck dumb at the sight as was the father of John the Baptist, but I was for a moment speechless; involuntarily I raised my eyes to see the rest of the beauteous form hovering over me, and throughout the recitation of the gospel the red-varnished toe-nails were a source of distraction. I have wondered since whether these toe-nails, which were the first part of the angelic form to appear, were meant to convey some special message, possibly some compensation for my failure to find a yogi. It may be so; but the meaning has not yet been revealed to me.

One thing at least is clear to me, that even an angelic messenger with a message from the invisible world must have a clearly defined form, and the message, if it is to be acceptable to slow-witted people like me, must be capable of verification in terms of the visible world and in accordance with the laws of logical reasoning and historical research. It may reveal a world beyond reason, but yet not contrary to reason, and the terms used must be an expression, however inadequate, of what they describe, so that we can say this word or description is valid and that one is not. So on the whole I found this very solid angel rather comforting and reassuring, and even the red-varnished toe-nails added to the effect.

'THE NUN'S STORY'

It was just this lack of definition that had haunted me throughout my journey, the failure to find a solid body. I could not find a yogi. 'You will hear of them,' I had been told, 'but you will not find one.' So it was. I never saw the source of the Ganges; but then no one else ever has. I had travelled in the district where it rises; I had been in the spot where it descends to the plain and begins to snake its course among the dwellings of men, receiving on the way so many additions foreign to its nature like the baulks of timber I had seen, some floating with the stream, others cast up high and dry on its banks, still more continuing an uneasy ebb and flow in quiet backwaters isolated

from the main stream. I had followed its course through great cities, marvelling at its metamorphosis into almost unrecognizable shapes and its incarnation into gods so numerous that no one has ever ventured to take a census of them. Finally I had been present at the operation whereby it was undergoing a sea-change into something strange and wonderful in anticipation of its journey to the West. But I did not find one who, journeying through the maze of winding intricate paths of the world of illusion, had arrived back at his source, achieved realization, escaped from the world of phenomena, triumphed over life and death and become one with God.

Neither I nor anyone else knows how Hinduism began, the origin of the Vedas; they are just there, no one saw them arrive. But that, to the Hindu, is of no consequence; they are eternal, infallible, and their truth is self-evident. More important, in searching for the visible manifestation of Hinduism I was unable to find any religious practice and interpretation of the Vedas that was valid and true to the exclusion of any others—all were true and equally all untrue, illusion. All religions were included, even Christianity, in spite of its vigorous protests against inclusion. It claimed to contain all because, being of its nature without form and indefinable, it was able to assume any form to suit its own convenience. It was a soul without a body, a religion without definite external expression, without a dogma. Essentially it belonged to the plane of becoming rather than of being; perhaps *a seeking for God* is the best description, St. Augustine's sense, in his approach to God, that 'there was something to be seen that he was not yet able to see', and so indescribable and indefinable.

Its source was unknown; it had no shape or form of which it could be said this rather than that belongs to it. All this might be dismissed as comparatively unimportant or accepted as a mystery, had it produced the effect it claimed of leading man to salvation. But I had not been able to find one who had been admitted through it to the sight of what he felt was to be seen, only he could not yet see it, one who had here and now attained. This is not to say that none of those who have now passed beyond the world of maya have attained. I hope and I believe that many of them have, but if they have, this has not come from anything that Hinduism had to offer them except—and it

is a big qualification—the hope and desire, the seeking after God, which seems to me its principal characteristic and is, after all, an invaluable contribution. It is the mind of the Christian Church that all salvation, realization, all transcending of the limitations of the natural world comes only through Christ, that all grace is of Christ whose visible body is the Church—he is wholly present in the Church as a whole and wholly present in each member—but that grace may flow beyond the limits of the visible Church. In the Church's tradition the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* of Cyprian is nicely balanced by Augustine's phrase that 'many who seem to be without [the Catholic Church] are in reality within, and many who seem to be within yet are really without'. I believe that many of those I met were of the former class. The last incident in my journey, on arriving in Bombay with, as I hoped, just two days in which to complete my arrangements for embarking on the first stage of my voyage home, provided me with a vivid picture of the contrast between the Hindu mind and the Christian. Almost it was an allegory of my whole journey.

On the evening of my arrival in Bombay my host carried me off to the cinema to see *The Nun's Story*. This was now in its second week at one of the principal cinemas of Bombay and was playing to full houses so that it was necessary to book seats for each show. The audience was composed largely of non-Christians, and the best tribute to the quality of the picture was the complete silence in which it was received and the fact that even at the end the audience filed out in silence with a complete absence of the animated conversation, discussion and criticism that breaks out normally, especially from an audience of Indians. It seemed to be accepted rather as a religious ceremony in the ancient Greek tradition than as a mere entertainment.

It was a moving story, excellently produced and with the chief actors well cast, and, as I have said, it was especially topical for me. I had been seeking a true yogi and here I was being taken to see the Christian concept of the true yogi. But here I knew well that I should not find one who had reached full realization. For the Christian, even for one who follows the Christian life in its perfection in the state of a 'yogi', there is no complete and final fulfilment, no perfect realization, in this world. But there is a way, one way, though perforce expressed in

terms of the world of maya, illusion, which followed faithfully will quite certainly flower into full and final realization beyond this world after death. The essence of the tragedy in this case was the uncertainty whether the 'yogi' was ever to find realization. Once one has left the way there can be no certainty.

Most readers will have seen the film or know the book, the story of one 'seeking God', of a nun, in the Indian idiom a female sadhu or swami, a *sannyasini*; a story therefore calculated to find a very sympathetic audience in India. We do not see the beginning, the origin of the Christian life, that was portrayed here in its highest manifestation, any more than I saw the sources of the Hinduism and yoga whose many forms I had observed on my journey. But this was not necessary: to the Christian it was already known, for the Hindu it was irrelevant. As for this visible presentation of Christian life, Hindu and Christian were equally capable of appreciating it, the nobility of the ideal, the conflict generated and the tragedy issuing from this particular set of circumstances. Yet while for the Christian the way of life portrayed here in one of its most perfect forms was the one way of salvation guaranteed by God to men, for the Hindu it was only one of any number of ways; you could start from anywhere, travel in any direction and always arrive at the same point. The shape and form of this particular religion was of importance only in so far as it was that into which this individual girl had been born—her karma—and this its perfect form had been freely chosen. The beginning was not shown. Both sections of the audience, Hindu and Christian, saw the drama played out on the plane of phenomena, the world of illusion. Paradoxical as this may seem it was probably the Hindu who formed for himself the clearest picture of the end we did not see.

The Christian could not be sure. Here was one who had been invited to the highest and, after an heroic struggle, had refused it. In obedience to Aristotle's rules for the hero of tragedy, one above the average of this body of religious who were as a body above the average, were by their profession aiming at more than the average—'more than I can'—had fallen through a flaw in her own character, a defect so subtle and operative in such circumstances that many have been left wondering whether it was truly a defect and not rather an added virtue. She herself—such is the impression given and it adds to the pathos—has no

doubt that the fault is hers, but she can 'take it' no longer. So she leaves the convent. We are not shown the end. In the closing scene we only see her, as we stand within the convent door watching, walk slowly down the street, in secular dress and bag in hand, until she reaches the turn of the road. There for a moment she hesitates and looks both ways: 'Where do we go from here?' Then with swift decision she turns—to the right—and walks vigorously away; and we see her no longer.

The Christian inevitably asked himself where she *did* go from here, what she did with the remainder of her life, whether she did work out her salvation and attain to realization. It is of the essence of the tragedy that we cannot be sure. It seems likely that she will join the 'Resistance' and so continue her nursing under still more arduous and trying conditions. There is no suggestion, of course, of her leaving the Church, the way of salvation. She has been released from her vows by the same authority that accepted them, the authority invested with the power of 'binding and loosing'. She has all the means of salvation at her disposal. She is a noble, generous soul, greater one feels in most respects than almost all those she has left behind; and so she remains—at least when we last see her: there is no bitterness in her heart, and the coldness of the charity of her superiors was very cold indeed. But will there be no lasting effect from the disillusionment: or will she throw herself into the work of the 'Resistance' and will this bring her to her desired end? It seems likely, but we are not sure and the Christian is left wondering, worried and uncertain. Some Indian girls who had thought of becoming nuns declared, to the no small concern of their clergy so that the Cardinal Archbishop of Bombay wrote a letter on the subject, that if this was the kind of thing that might happen to them, then they would rather remain as they were.

It is unlikely that the Hindu section of the audience had any such doubts. Here was one who had refused her karma. It was her lot to be a Christian, in itself a matter of indifference but it happened to be her karma. Within that religion her karma was to a certain, the highest, form of life: and she had refused it. The issue was clear-cut: a karma unfulfilled, binding her still more closely to the wheel of rebirth. Her next incarnation would be on a lower level, how low no one can tell. Had she

accepted her lot she could hardly have attained to 'realization' in this incarnation—incarnations are spoken of in terms of thousands and even millions—but she might possibly have been reborn a Hindu, perhaps even a swami, a sannyasini, yogini, even perhaps to die on the banks of Ganges in the Holy City of Light, Kashi, Banaras, Varanasi, and so in the end reach nirvana. Who knows?

EPILOGUE

As I make the final revision of these pages a contributor to the current press correspondence on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is demanding (*The Tablet*, November 26th, 1960) details of the route to St. Paul's 'third heaven', to the terrestrial paradise, that is, of which the entrance was barred to our first parents by an angel with a sword of light: 'There must be some one who has been there and knows the way; if only they would tell us!' The writer had in her undergraduate days, she tells us, read concurrently D. H. Lawrence ('smuggled in') and the Christian mystics, and decided that experiment along the lines of the latter was likely to be both more exciting and more rewarding. Christianity spread so rapidly in the beginning, she considers, because of its emphasis on this positive aspect, as reopening the way to the Kingdom of God present here and now, to 'joys unspeakable and a peace beyond all tranquillizers'; and she suggests that our young people today are still seeking for such experience and fulfilment.

The fact is that the Yogi, the Zen Buddhist and the Christian—and not least, it is obvious, the writer of the letter—are all aware that what they are seeking is already here, that 'there is something to be seen that they are not yet able to see' and that it is undue immersion in external phenomena that hinders them from seeing it. For the Christian, indeed, the way is now open, but to tread it to the end requires not only something of the heroic spirit but also an unwavering discipline; and very few are found prepared to take it.

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